STUDIES IN THE RAMAYANA

BY

Samskṛta Sāhitee Vallabha, Sārasvata Sārajna
T. SUNDARACHARIAR, B.A., B.L.,

with a Foreword by
The Hon'ble Sir S. VARADACHARIAR,
Judge, Federal Court, India.

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FOREWORD

Mr. Sundaracharìar has done me the honour of inviting me to write a foreword to his 'Studies in the Ramayana'. I am grateful for the privilege. The present publication covers only the Balakanda; it is thus in the nature of *dik-pradarsana* (showing the way). Let me hope that the reception accorded to this booklet will be such as to induce him to publish similar studies in respect of the other Kandas.

Whether or not Valmiki was a devotee of 'art for art's sake', Mr. Sundarachariar has abundantly shown that the Ramayana is an Immortal work of art—only it is much more, in that "it has presented to the Hindu mind those ideals of conduct and character which have ever since been the watchwords of the Indian striving". The artistic and the moral excellences of the work have been illustrated by references to certain parts of Balakanda and its story. The exposition of the much misunderstood role of the sage Narada in the Hindu Puranic lore is instructive. He is aptly described as "the founder of a new *pravritti-marga*, synthesising the depth and intensity of a *Muni* with the life of action and dedication to the public good". The episode of the hunter shooting one of the *Krauncha* birds and the piteous cry of its mate calling forth the first *sloka* from Valmiki is interpreted as the moral crisis which impelled

Valmiki, under the inspiration of Narada to produce the work which offered a new solution to the moral problem of Existence, not along the lines of *Nivritti* (resignation), but on the basis of *Pravritti* (action), presenting, for all men to follow, the story of the 'Perfect man', the man who was so perfect that he could only be god-incarnate.

There is an interesting discussion of the value of the conception of a 'personal god', of the theory of incarnation and of the theme of the eternal struggle between the devas and the asuras which is intimately connected in Hindu lore with the several incarnations of the Almighty. "Mythology and Poetry" observes Mr. Sundaracbariar, "are twin sisters and have to use their own language of form and symbol in order to suggest truths and realities which are remote from our normal mind". He rightly adds "To understand the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, there is need to understand and master the language of form and symbol which was the ancient inheritence of the poets who made them". Emphasis is also laid on the necessity of a correct appreciation of the Ravana-conception. He was not a brute but a great *Tapasvi* as well as a hero, a Superman: only, he represented the egoistic stage of evolution. The place of Visvamitra in the story of the Ramayana, a part which may be described as an aspect of the cosmic force, has been fully elucidated. How he plays at once the parts of Guru and Devotee to the Incarnate Lord has been described in touching terms.

Apropos the episodes relating to Tataka and Ahalya the following comment deserves to be noted; "It is no accident that makes the poet confront us in the Bala-kanda with three types of woman, *viz.*, Thataka, Ahalya and Sita. Do they not stand for the three types Tamasic, Rajasic and Satvic? The first type admits of no salvation, it has to be slain by the Lord. The second type errs and succumbs but has in it the seed of an innate perfection. Ahalya has to be subjected to torment and crusifixion as the price of her resurrection. The third redeems the Redeemer himself and the Lord weds her in mystic union."

Lovers of the Ramayana, particularly those who have not had occasion to hear Mr. Sundarachariar's discourses, will, I have little doubt, be enabled by a perusal of these studies, to perceive more beauty and more meaning in the great epic than they ever expected.

MYLAPORE,
1—8—1945

S. VARADACHARI

PREFACE

These studies in the Ramayana are based on a series of lectures delivered in 1944 at Kumbakonam before an audience of eminent scholars. Those who listened to them have expressed a desire that they should appear in a more permanent form, so that they may reach a larger public. Other friends of mine at Madras and elsewhere have also encouraged me to undertake the publication. In deference to their desire I have ventured to present the lectures in the form of a book of which this is the first volume. Though fully aware of its many defects, I submit this to the public only trusting that the lessons of intelligent criticism may make each succeeding volume less imperfect.

It has always been my practice to deliver my discourses in Tamil whether they be for academic bodies or for the general public. In the hope that they may perhaps be of interest to a wider range of readers, they are now rendered into English.

To the Hindu, the Ramayana is not a mere work of art. It is an *Itihasa* as well. It is as sacred as the Upanishads themselves. The author says that his work is an elaboration and an elucidation of the sublime truths in the Vedas. It is quite natural, however, that this great ancient classic which appeals to many of our heart's emotions should be approached in different ways by different critics and commentators. Western scholars and in their wake, scholars of our own land, have shown a partiality for the evaluation of the Ramayana as a mere poetic masterpiece. In this work I have attempted to approach the poem from the religious or spiritual

point of view without forgetting its purely literary graces and merits.

The book is in two parts. The first part is a rapid and critical survey of the story of the Ramayana and its spiritual and literary import. The second part consists of notes on various points which arise from the text and which would also help to supplement what has been said in the first part. They may perhaps be considered lengthy and, in some places, independent. On a closer examination it will be found that they throw on some of the slokas and episodes of the Epic a new light from passages in the works of other Sanskrit poets and dramatists who have in different ways dealt with the story of the Ramayana.

I have received invaluable help in different forms from many a friend in bringing out this book. But as I believe that I am only one of the several instruments used by Providence for fulfilling its own inscrutable purposes, I consider I should be arrogating too much importance to my own share in it if I were to adopt the usual convention of mentioning them by name and expressing my gratitude to them. Let me therefore be permitted to conclude these few words with a slight adaptation of Kalidasa's well-known appeal

प्रीतेर्वा प्रणयिजने रघुकुलतिलके परानुरक्तेर्वा ।
सुन्दरभणितिमपीमां विमृशत मनसा प्रसादपरमेण ॥

No. 3, Gopathi
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31—7—'45.

T. SUNDARACHARI

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STUDIES IN THE RAMAYANA

1. GENESIS OF THE RAMAYANA

SECTION I

Introductory

The epic poem of Valmiki, known as the Ramayana, holds a unique place in the literary history of the world. It is the sovereign utterance of the Indian mind at a supreme moment in the dim past of its cultural evolution. Ages of moral and spiritual striving, struggles and aspirations, the will to the transfigured life of countless souls who have passed into silence have been woven into its texture. Not only does it incarnate the past, but it lights a lamp which will bathe ages to come in its resplendent radiance.

It may, in very truth, be said that no poem, ancient or modern, has sunk so deep into the hearts and lives of so many successive generations of men and women as the Ramayana. To the Hindus it is much more than a great epic poem. It is their daily and most popular scripture, the unfailing means whereby forlorn and helpless man ferries over the dark waters of existence. Ever since it was written, it has, in a sense, described the whole circle of Hindu history. For thirty centuries and more, it has been the heart's heart, the never-failing conscience of the Indian people. Like the Vedas and the Upanishads it presaged and inaugurated a new epoch, in

which the great Vedic and Upanishadic ideals, lost on mountain tops and open only to intellectual Alpine-explorers, were to descend into the valley and irrigate the general body of humanity. It has presented to the Hindu mind those ideals of conduct and character which have ever since been the watch-words of the Indian striving.

It is remarkable that, from the very first, the Ramayana was intended for and propagated to the common people, and yet its glory lies in the fact that the very elect find in it the home of their soul. No one who is unfamiliar with Indian conditions can understand the part that the Indian rhapsodist or expositor has played in the development of the common Indian mind. He is an institution by himself. He is a scholar, poet, musician, actor, devotee all in one. Hundreds of these itinerant minstrels have carried the message of the Ramayana far and wide, till to-day there is not a nook or corner of this vast continent where it has not penetrated. Night after night, in cities and villages, after the day's tasks are over, young and old, rich and poor, high and low, men and women gather round him and listen for hours, intent and rapt, to his stirring recitations. Now he reads, and now he sings; and anon he expounds and exhorts, while the more gifted ones carry their audience to sublime heights on the wings of music, by the strange and new light they throw on the wonted theme. Religion, theology, morals, metaphysics, all these crop up

and find a place in the discourse. And the whole narration is enlivened by that gentle and playful humour without which the loftiest themes are apt to degenerate into a dreary infliction. What a marvellous instrument of elevation and enlightenment a great work of art and religion like the Ramayana can prove in the hands of capable narrators! Thus it is that the Ramayana has been daily lived and relived and kept perennially fresh in the thoughts and feelings of the Hindu race. Thus it is that even the humblest and lowest in the land, not excluding even the so-called out-caste communities, have been initiated into the great national memories and heroic ideals which it is the aim of the Ramayana to delineate and immortalise. Thus it is that the Ramayana has served as the great store-house from which the Hindu knight and warrior, king and statesman, master and servant, citizen and house-holder, woman and wife have derived, each the noblest conception of his or her respective duty and function. And thus it is that from time out of mind, there has been running throughout the country the shining strand of a common humanity and a common culture.

In Hindu tradition, the deepest significance of the Ramayana consists in the fact that it is a synthesis of all the Sastras. It is another Veda and a revelation of ultimate truths. In this view the supreme poet reaches a summit where he becomes one with the philosopher and mystic, devotee and prophet, reformer and even man

of action. Viewing and depicting life and reality from so exalted a plane, he becomes no mere weaver of dainty word-fabrics or fairy thought-patterns which glitter or glisten for their brief delightful hour, but a prime director of human evolution and the builder of eternal norms. And by common consent in India, Valmiki stands as the head and crown of such transcendental poets.

The world has ever abounded in decalogues and codes, injunctions and prohibitions, which seek to discipline the human will, curbing the coarser and stimulating the nobler parts of human nature. In spite of their immense vogue, man persists in being as unregenrate as ever. Neither alluring pictures of the joys of heaven nor lurid pictures of the torments of hell have availed much in putting a break upon the primitive human momentum. The great problem of moral education is ever with us. But in Valmiki's hands it receives a magical solution. For, so vivid and throbbing are his characters and so compelling their attraction—quite apart from the question of the historical basis of the epic—that they succeed in effecting a delicate and subtle transmutation of human nature. Hindu character with all its strength and weakness has derived in the main from the Ramayana, and Valmiki has shown that poetry can be a moral power of the highest order. What rivers of beneficence and mercy and holiness have flowed from this wonderful poem! How like

a pillar of fire it has been the guidance of the Indian ages, humanising the grosser and divinising the finer human material! How like a subtle perfume it has filled the home and the court, the field and the hall, the bright and the dark! How radiant and pure, spotless and silent with a heart of flame and a touch of the flower has been the womanhood it has given birth to! And how noble and dignified, chivalrous and heroic the manhood it has nurtured and the legion of saints, known and unknown, who have sped on its wings unto the feet of the Divine! What witchery of art is it that has enabled the poet to achieve this marvellous dynamism?

But what is the core and central significance of this remarkable poem? Wherein lies its universal appeal? It is a truism to say that poetry holds the mirror up to nature. But what layer or stratum of human nature is Art to unveil? Is it to reflect and inflame to a new potency the gross outer surfaces of life open to all the winds that blow, catching upon them the light of the sun and the stars no doubt, but riven equally by the dread thunder of the Gods? Or, is Art to dig deep down to our inmost self entombed within rock upon rock and summon it to a new resurrection? Valmiki's answer at any rate is not in doubt. He was no devotee of art for art's sake. Art should ever be the servant of man's highest ideals. None who has not walked in the twilight of the Gods and caught the whispers of heaven has any business to dabble in poetry. नानृषिः कुरुते काव्यम्।

For nineteen centuries the Christian world has been dreaming of the cross, deeming it the world's ransom. Long previously, there had arisen in India a poet-sage who had stripped human nature of all its outer trappings and vestments only to find inscribed upon the heart of man and woman the symbol of the cross! "Know thyself, Oh Man" cries out Valmiki. But what a self! It is a self wedded not to the pursuit of pleasure or happiness but to the worship of suffering almost as an end in itself. Man has to drink the bitter cup and drink it to the lees, and ask for more. Thus alone can man deliver his Self from himself. So understood, the Ramayana becomes much more than an immortal work of art. It is a gospel for the world at large. As Sister Nivedita has so beautifully put it, it is the world-gospel of love and purity.

SECTION 2

The Poet's Life.

Nothing indeed is more characteristic of the Hindu attitude towards life, than the dense obscurity that invests the lives and fortunes of the great figures in Indian thought and history. We know nothing about the inspired singers of the Vedic Hymns, the august founders of Indian culture, and we have only fugitive glimpses of the great masters of Upanishadic lore and illumination, like Yajnavalkya, Aruni or Janaka. Even

the Buddacharita of Asvahgosha, which seems at first sight to be an exception to the general rule, cannot be said to be a biography of Buddha in the modern sense. Coming down to later times, the position seems to be slightly better though even here, legends and stories preponderate, where we look for concrete incidents and well-attested facts. Equally dark is the night that surrounds the careers of kings and statesmen, generals and military leaders and the many mighty men of action of whom Indian History has had its share. This phenomenon is indeed so pronounced that many have attributed to the Hindu mind a bankruptcy of the historical sense; and ancient India seems to differ sharply in this respect from ancient China which seems early to have developed a strongly positive turn of mind.

Recognising as we should that the critical and historical sense is largely a modern development the world over, we have still to trace the phenomenon described above to psychological roots deep down in the mental make-up of the Hindu race. From earliest times the Hindu mind seems to have soared into transcendentalism as a bird takes to the air. It may be that the Hindu is but the elder child of evolution and that many phases of thought and experience had been sounded and left behind in the aeonic past of the race. At any rate, it is beyond question that the ruling passion of the Hindu spirit, as we know it, has been not to raise waves big or small in the river of time, but rather to stand aside, watch and

detach itself from the exhilarating current and look deep into its crystal or turbid bed, its primeval source, its predestined goal. Thus the Hindu has prized thought above action, self-effacement above self-assertion, giving above taking, silence above speech. It is obvious that such an outlook will entail its own penalties and dangers. For one thing it has been the primary cause of most of the calamities that have overtaken the Hindu people in the course of their history, but likewise it is the salt and savour which has preserved and sustained them. It seems to carry within it the seed of a life ever-lasting and invincible.

Reflections like these suggest themselves inevitably when we contemplate the life of India's greatest poet, Valmiki. Through and by means of the Ramayana, he, more than anything else, has helped to instil and foster the spirit and outlook described above into the common Indian mind. About his own life we know little except that he was a great Rishi, sage and poet and a contemporary of the events he has narrated in his epic. In the Uttarakanda (Sarga 96, slokas 19-21.) of the Ramayana "where Valmiki figures as a character" he describes himself as the tenth son of Prachetas and he declares that he has never spoken an untruth or committed any sin in thought, word or deed, and that he had performed austerities for many thousand years. Prachetas is one of the names of Varuna and Valmiki is here made to claim divine parentage.

In the Anusasana Parva of the Mahabharata, we are told that once when he was engaged in a disputation with God Agni and some sages, he chanced to commit an error of intonation in repeating a Vedic text and his antagonists pounced upon him and charged him with the foulest of crimes, viz., the murder of the Sruti, the mother of existence. To purify himself from this sin, he sought the grace of God Rudra, who absolved him and blessed that one day his fame would shine through all the worlds. The story seems to have a far-reaching significance. The text of the Veda and its minutiae had acquired such a dominion on men's minds that the spirit within was being smothered and extinguished. And it seems to have been the aim and mission of Valmiki to resuscitate the spirit of the Vedas, emphasise their deeper import for the life and conduct of man and transmit it to the multitude in shapes of ever-living beauty.

But the most popular version of Valmiki's life which also seeks to account for his name, Valmiki, (one who was delivered out of an ant-hill) is strangely different. According to this account Valmiki was a Brahmin by birth and early in life was abandoned by his parents, became a hunter and highwayman and lived by robbing and killing. One day he chanced to waylay the divine sage Narada and called upon him to deliver his all. Now Narada had nothing to call his own except God, the Lord of all, and the time had come for Valmiki to

receive this gift of gifts from the sage. Narada saw deep into Valmiki's inner being and perceived that great fires were slumbering within him in spite of the life he was leading. "Well" said Narada, "Why do you lead this sinful and wicked life?" The robber answered:—"Only thus can I support myself and my family." "But", answered Narada, "do you know that perdition awaits you as a result of your misdeeds? Have you ascertained that your wife and children will also partake of the doom and suffering which will result from your misdeeds?" "Oh certainly," replied the robber in his naivete. "I have great doubts," answered the sage, "but we will put it to the test. Go home and ask your wife and children. Meanwhile, upon my word I will abide here till you return." The robber went home accordingly, but to his surprise and indignation found that his wife and children scornfully spurned the very idea of sharing the robber's punishments. The scales fell from his eyes and he retraced his steps to the sage in a stupor of disillusionment. "Pardon me, Oh sage," he said, "Have mercy upon me and set me on the path, treading which I will not have cause to regret or bemoan." This was the moment for which Narada had been waiting. He took the robber by the hand, initiated him then and there into the divine name Rama, blessed him and departed. It is also said that, as he was unable to pronounce the name, the sage asked him to repeat the word in an inverted form. Like a serpent casting off its slough did

Valmiki emerge from his old self and plunge into the divine name with such intensity of aborption that white ants came and built their hill round him, and still he did not wake up from his trance. After many, many years had passed in this wise, his Guru Narada understanding that he had become perfected came again and called him. At his word, he woke up and Narada asked him to come out of the ant-hill and bestowed upon him at the same time the name Valmiki. If there be any nucleus of truth in this story, we can understand that Valmiki knew from his own experience that even the most sinful and wicked carry within them the seed of immortal perfection, and we can trace to the poet's own past the passion for the moral regeneration of men that throbs in the Ramayana.

SECTION 3.

Valmiki-Narada Meeting

The Ramayana opens with a description of how it came to be composed and promulgated. And the account is one of the most remarkable and illuminating in literature. It admits us to the heart of the Indian conception regarding the conditions of artistic creation on an immortal scale. The sage Valmiki is seated in his hermitage in the forest, evidently lost in thought. His former Guru, Narada, pays him a visit and is welcomed with the honour due to so exalted a personage. But who was Narada? Conflicting and confusing accounts are to

be met with about him in sacred literature and it is impossible to fix his lineaments with any certainty. But one thing we can confidently assert, and that is that he has grown to be an archetype and ideal. He is the very prince and paragon of devotees, he is perfect in knowledge and insight, in holiness and divine love. The boon of immortality in the flesh is his. Ever he wanders up and down the worlds absorbed in the glory of the divine name and singing His praises to the rapturous notes of his Veena. Now he visits the heavenly worlds and now the haunts of men. But what is stranger still is that he watches over the fortunes of a changing world with jealous eyes. And in every crisis his hand is to be felt. He is a proverbial provoker of quarrels, seemingly trivial, but reaching out to profound and eventful issues in the unfolding of time. By a chance visit here, a casual remark there, and in a seemingly sportive and even mischievous manner, he gives a new turn to the wheel of world-destiny, And whenever a sincere and striving soul is in anguish of spirit, he hears the unuttered call and hastens to help and quicken. Such was Valmiki's divine visitant. But what silent and agonising cry of Valmiki's heart had drawn Narada's footsteps in the direction of the hermitage? The questions that Valmiki put to the sage almost immediately supply the answer. And here they are. "Who, indeed, Oh Sage! on this earth, even at the present time, could be said to be endowed with all the wealth of noble qualities and.

who could be said to be possessed of mastery and prowess! who indeed is a knower of the stainless "Dharma" and who could be said to be endowed with true gratitude! Who could be said to be truthful in speech, firm in vows and endowed with proper conduct! Who could be said to cherish the well-being of all creatures equally! Who could be said to be the enlightened one and who could be regarded as the skilful and competent one! and who the one and sole captivator! Who could be said to be calm and self-possessed and the conqueror of anger! Who could be said to be possessed of true majesty and freedom from jealousy! Whose wrath in battle, Oh sage, could be said to fill the very Gods with terror! Thou alone art competent to know and tell me of such a person and great indeed is my yearning to hear of such an one."

एतदिच्छाम्यहं श्रोतुं परं कौतूहलं हि मे ।
महर्षे त्वं समर्थोऽसि ज्ञातुमेवंविधं नरम् ॥

It is of vital importance that we should understand the essence and meaning of these questions which form really one great question; for on it will depend our understanding of the Ramayana.

But a deep comprehension of the first sloka will alone put us in possession of the key that will unlock the doors of the great question itself. The first sloka is one of the most marvellous and truly inspired in the whole range of literature. It touches our spirit like the silent opening of a sanctuary door and is a fitting

prelude to the wonderful poem itself. Its delicate simplicity, divine freshness, unflawed rhythm and the subtle aroma that arises from it are more to be felt than described. It sets vibrating rare chords in the secret places of the heart. And throughout the poem its grip upon us is to be felt abidingly. It may be quoted and translated as follows :—

तपःस्वाध्यायनिरतं तपस्वी वाग्विदांवरम् ।
नारदं परिपप्रच्छ वाल्मीकिर्मुनिपुङ्गवम् ॥

'Valmiki, the great Tapasvi, put an all comprehensive question to Narada who ceaselessly delighted in Tapas and Vedic study, who was the foremost of the knowers of speech and who was a veritable prince amongst silent sages.' We cannot too strongly emphasise the fact that this first sloka presents to us in a most pregnant manner the great ideals of what may be termed the heroic ages of Indian spirituality. They were summed up in the three words "Tapas', 'Mouna' and 'Vak." And Narada is presented to us as an adept in all the three. We have now to glance at the profound conceptions for which they stand.

What is 'Tapas? The great hymn of creation, considered by many as the profoundest in the whole of the Rig Veda, in tracing the genesis of the formed from the unformed, of the finite from the infinite, has the following mantra :

तपसस्तन्महिना जायतैकम् -Rig. 10·129·3. "That one was born by the all-might of intension." Hindu

scholars and divines have differed as to the precise significance of the word 'Tapas' in this context. Some have understood by it the divine knowledge, others the divine power, and so on. Many stories are to be met with in Hindu sacred literature that God himself performed 'tapas' for the purpose of doing this or that. One thing is clear, the word stands for some ultimate conception that defies analysis and presentation. Amongst the seven planes of being which are indicated by the seven 'Vyahritis', we have the 'tapo-loka' as the sixth in the rising gradation and the second in the descent. And by 'Tapo-loka' has been understood the world of causal being. But if 'tapas' is the first (or according to some the penultimate) power in the evolving cosmos, inversely it will be the highest term in the ascent of man into the god-head.

That is why so much stress has been laid in the Hindu books upon the performance of 'tapas' for the upward aspirant, even in the most ordinary duties of life. It is thus the essence of evolution and involution.

But what is the summit and acme of 'tapas' in the ascending process? It is 'mouna', the final and inexpressible silence. "This Atman" says the Upanishad, "is silence," unable to attain which mind and speech recoil baffled. यतो वाचो निवर्तन्ते अप्राप्य मनसा सह ।

We have now to glance at the last term of the triad, 'vak' which seems to connote the first evolute out of the silence. It is the Hindu belief that the worlds have

been created out of the primeval word 'Om' and that the Vedas are merely the explication and utterance of that single syllable. We have again to knock our heads against one of the ultimate conceptions. There is the Vedic text "प्रजापतिर्वै इदमासीत् । तस्य वाग् द्वितीया आसीत् । वाग्वै परमं ब्रह्म ॥" Here Vak is identified with the supreme Brahman. How like a literal translation of this ancient Vedic text are the opening words of St. John's Gospel: "In the beginning was the word. And the word was with God. And the word was God." Hindu thought classifies the universe under four heads or principles, viz., the gross or the empirical, the subtle, the causal, and the transcendental. Thus there are four degrees or states of consciousness, the waking (Jagrat), the dreaming (Swapna), deep sleep (Sushupti), and the fourth or transcendental (Turiya). In the same way there are four grades in Vak or speech. And this is stated to us as early as the Rig Veda which has the following 'Mantra' "चत्वारि वाक् परिमिता पदानि तानि विदुः ब्राह्मणा ये मनीषिणः।" गुहा त्रीणि निहिता नेङ्गयन्ति तुरीयं वाचो मनुष्या वदन्ति ॥ Four kinds of speech have been enumerated which only Brahmanas (knowers of Brahman) deep in understanding can comprehend. Three of them are hidden in the secrecy of the cave. It is the fourth kind of speech that men speak." These four kinds have been designated as Vaikhari, Madhyama, Pasyanti and Para. The lowest is Vaikhari and the others are the subtle, causal and transcendental aspects. In the last analysis

vak will be the equivalent of Sarasvati, Sakti and even, Maya. There may be difference of opinion in matters so profound but we have attempted a popular account of the matter. When Narada is styled as the foremost of the knowers of Vak, we are not merely to understand by it that he was a great master of human speech, but that he had dived deepest into the realm of creative expression and listened to its very heart-beats.

The first verse thus presents Narada to us as one who had scaled the highest summits of the ancient discipline and wisdom and become a Guru amongst Gurus. But how is Valmiki the questioner characterised? Only by the solitary epithet 'tapasvi'. At a later stage Narada himself was to call Valmiki a Muni. But here Valmiki is in the attitude of a disciple towards a master and that he was a fit and proper disciple is alone indicated by the word 'tapasvi.' There is also a suggestion that he was a Tapasvi in another sense, in that his mental condition at the time was one that called forth sympathy and pity.

It is the Hindu belief that all knowledge, even secular knowledge, to be fruitful, has to be imparted by a living teacher to a disciple who is in a receptive frame of mind.

Says the Upanishad :—

"आचार्यः पूर्वरूपम्; अन्तेवास्युत्तररूपम्; विद्यासन्धिः; प्रवचनं
सन्धानम्।

'The teacher is the anterior form, the disciple the posterior, knowledge the conjunction, teaching the medium.'

Knowledge in fact is an organic process requiring the meeting and conjunction of two spirits. Like the seed and the field, like steel and flint or like man and woman is the relationship between the teacher and the taught. In the present case, we have Narada as a teacher and Valmiki as a student. But what knowledge is the latter seeking? The first verse would lead us to expect that he is about to ask for the knowledge of the Atman or Brahman. But how different are the questions that follow!

They pose instead the problem of the perfect man, (Nara) of man perfect here and now. Valmiki seeks not the substance but qualities; not the thing-in-itself but the plenitude of its manifestation in space and time. He hankers indeed for the supreme truth, the supreme good and the supreme beauty, but embodied in one unique person. Is there an ideal made real to sense? Can the word become flesh? This is the quest that has set him aflame. The emphasis in his questions, it has to be further noted, is on life and action, on Pravritti, to use the language of Hindu thought. During his long years of intense inner search and discipline, we cannot doubt that he had come face to face with the spirit-God throned on the sublime by peaks of self-isolation, but his spirit is seeking still. He wants to embrace

the living moving, God. He wants in fact to build a bridge between heaven and earth, and dreams a dream of millennial glory. In and through him Hindu spirituality was taking its next great step forward. The long ages of austerity and silence in forest and cave which had blossomed into the Upanishadic illumination were now to culminate in their logical complement and outcome in a sublimated humanism. The Ramayana is nothing if not the Upanishad of man and woman, of the glorious body of God which is being perpetually crucified in the process of the cosmos. And the opening verses present to us the soul of Valmiki in the throes of the great spiritual crisis which was to launch him on the new evangel. And when Narada is chosen to reveal the saving knowledge to him, we cannot but infer that he had already become the foremost propounder of a new pravritti-marga, synthesising the depth and intensity of a muni with the life of action and dedication to the general good.

A thrill of joy ran through Narada as he heard Valmiki's questions. The guru is always on the search for that particular disciple who alone can be the fit vessel of his spirit. What greater questions have ever been asked than these, and who could have asked them but Valmiki ?

Narada had found that particular soul through whom his message of a transmuted pravritti-marga could pour itself out on a waiting world, and it was, therefore, with

something like ecstasy that he began to answer Valmiki's questions.

"Listen, Oh Sage," he said, "many and difficult of attainment indeed are the qualities thou hast recounted. Knowing of one such person I will describe him to thee. None else is he than the far-famed Rama, sprung of the race of Ikshvaku. Of chastened soul and peerless prowess, shining and lustrous in mind and body, he has an immovable spirit and is tireless in ruling his senses. Possessed is he of the intellect, wise and pure, and of the true principle of action and conduct. Gifted is he with unrivalled eloquence and power of speech. He is the one subduer of foes and the grace of his loveliness is perfect in every limb. Truly is he versed in the knowledge of the law immutable and ever he sets his heart upon the truth alone. Ever he delights in the good and happiness of all creatures alike. He is endued with glory, insight, stainless purity and stirless poise of soul, and withal he is wondrous easy to gratify and win. Equal unto all like the creator himself, he sustains the worlds and represses hostile powers. He ministers unto all as he ministers to his very own and ever he stands guard over universal righteousness and duty, even as he guards and fulfils his own. Master is he of the deep import of the scriptures and of all sciences, no less than of the entire science of arms. Sovereign in memory and resplendent in genius, he is beloved of every one. Unflagging and buoyant, sweet and gentle, he has the

vision that sees far and near. Ever noble, ever just in any and every situation he is equally gracious and, blissful to behold. Even as the ocean is the goal of the rivers so is he the refuge and home of the humble and the good. Like unto the ocean in depth, like unto the Himalayas in firmness, like unto the God Vishnu in bravery and valour, in wrath like unto the fire of the world-dissolution, like unto the earth in forgiveness and forbearance, like unto the moon ever delightful to see, like unto the God of wealth himself in giving, he, the darling child of Kausalya, is even like another deity of righteousness in embodied form."

How wonderful is the dream of human perfection conjured up in these immortal lines. The original Sanskrit, resonant as it is with subtle suggestions and echoes, defies any adequate rendering into a foreign language. It has been well-remarked that the human race has never been able to improve upon the picture here presented of flawless, full-orbed manhood. The Greek ideal of physical beauty, the puritan ideal of moral sternness, the ethical ideal of self-giving, the philosophic ideal of stability and poise, the aesthetic ideal of perfect beauty, the ascetic ideal of bareness and simplicity, the hero's ideal of the very extreme, the mystic's ideal of sublimity, the Nietzschean ideal of the Superman—all these and even a certain divine common-placeness find their focus and meeting-ground in the perfect man. All the dualities are resolved and transfigured in him.

But he is no mere bundle of qualities and attributes; he is a supreme person, an unique individual into whom the qualities are interwoven. But above all he is simple, free, spontaneous as a child.

It will be a riddle to many that Narada did not describe Rama as an incarnation of Vishnu. We cannot unravel the riddle without understanding the relationship between master and disciple. The Guru opens the eyes of the disciple, utters what the latter is dimly groping after and releases latent impulses struggling for expression. But never does he reveal everything. In order that the disciple may grow and develop, he leaves a large unexplored territory which the disciple has to conquer and annex by his own unaided efforts. Thus it was that although Narada revealed the perfect man to Valmiki and gave unto his hands the golden fruit of the everlasting tree of Heaven (he left it to him to dig for its roots in the empyrean above. Thus also it was that Narada left to Valmiki himself to discover that even greater dream of perfection, known as Sita. Two marvellous touches alone give the clue to her. In beauty, she was like unto Devamaya (the wondrous illusion—creation of the Devas) and she was the woman, Nārī and the very life and soul of Rama, the Nara. Nor are we to understand that Valmiki till then had been insensitive and blind to the marvel that was Rama. We cannot doubt that his mind had been working on that very theme when the Guru came to dispel doubts, to

give assurance and certitude and to kindle the light that was to illumine his long path.

Having described Rama, Narada proceeded to relate in brief the whole story of Rama's life, that which had happened and that which was yet to come; and the first canto of the poem which contains the sketch is known amongst the Hindus as the Ramayana in epitome and considered by them as fruitful and hallowed as the entire Ramayana itself. The first canto was composed doubtless in obedience to a literary convention which obliged every epic poet to give at the very outset a brief summary of the whole story. The first canto strikes in a truly marvellous measure all those notes of simplicity, sweetness, straightness and magical rhythm that will meet us throughout the great poem. Having blessed Valmiki, Narada took his leave.

SECTION 4.

Birth of the First Sloka and After.

Silent and brooding sat Valmiki in the hermitage after Narada had departed; and after a short while betook himself to the banks of the Tamasa, the stream which flowed at no great distance from the holy Ganges. But, as he went, his heart sang within him and his feet hardly touched the ground. "Behold" said he on seeing the river, turning to the disciple at hand, "Behold, how pure and stainless these waters are to-day! How

ravishing, pellucid and serene, how they look like the very hearts of the good! Here have I resolved to take my bath."

What new-born rapture is in the woods to-day! What stillness that touches the spirit with secret fires! Why does Valmiki roam and linger for long hours forgetting the daily bath and eyeing every dreaming tree and laughing flower and the very grass beneath the feet as if they wore the vestal robes of a new consecration!

What we are within, that we see around us. Valmiki had received the supreme initiation from Narada; the name that cleaves at a stroke "the knot of the heart" had been whispered into his ears. And the wave of joy that swept his entire being broke all barriers and communicated itself to all around him.

And as Valmiki feasted his eyes on every new wonder that the woods disclosed, he chanced to espy a beautiful pair of Krauncha birds that were sporting in amorous dalliance. Gay and shining and sleek they were and so sweet and tender was their cooing that the sage could do nothing but stand and watch, rapt in a reverie of bliss. But at that very moment a cruel fowler aimed an arrow at the he-bird and sent it rolling and writhing to the ground. Thereat the female bird was sore-stricken and wailed long and disconsolately. The sight was too much for the Rishi to bear and he burst out half-unconsciously: "Since thou, Oh wicked

hunter, didst slay the male-bird infatuated with passion, thou shalt not thrive and fare for length of days,"

मा निषाद प्रतिष्ठां त्वमगमः शाश्वतीस्समाः ।
यत्क्रौञ्चमिथुनादेकं अवधीः काममोहितम् ॥

Hardly had the words escaped his lips when the sage caught himself and it occurred to him that he was speaking in a new manner. "What is this", he reflected, "that has been wrung out of my heart shaken with grief on account of the bird?" Reflecting again and again he resolved that he had spoken a new language, the language of poetry. Turning to his disciple Bharadwaja, he said, "These words of mine array themselves naturally in feet which have an equal number of syllables and they have a rhythmic time-pace which mingles and melts into the general cadence. Let what is born of my grief become henceforth a Sloka."

पादबद्धोऽक्षरसमः तन्त्रीलयसमन्वितः ।
शोकार्तस्य प्रवृत्तो मे श्लोको भवतु नान्यथा ॥

Having performed his ablutions in the river, he returned to his hermitage followed by the disciple. But as he returned and even afterwards his heart was full only of the rending spectacle he had witnessed in the forest and again and again his thoughts revolved round it.

At this juncture the great Brahma, the Creator of the worlds, entered the Ashrama, and Valmiki worshipped him in wonder and reverence. But even the august presence of Brahma could not lift the shadow that lay

on his heart and inwardly he felt a churning within him and he groaned in spirit, thinking: "How wicked of that sinful wretch! How lost was the fowler to sense and feeling! How indeed could he slay the sweet-voiced bird, all innocent and unoffending as it was?" The arrow shot by the hunter had lodged itself in the deep heart of Valmiki and made it tremulous with all the sorrow and suffering of existence. In the episode of the Krauncha birds Valmiki saw the microcosm of the human problem. Valmiki, no less than the Buddha, was seared by the evil and misery of the world. But he approached it from a different angle and his solution differs strangely from the Buddha's.

The Lord Brahma, looking deep into Valmiki's eyes, spoke smilingly and said "Cease! Oh sage! cease this musing of thine. It was by my will that thou gavest utterance to that new mode of speech. Do thou sing in this new metre the whole story of Rama even as thou hast heard it from Narada. What is known and what is unknown in the lives of Rama and Sita and of the Rakshasa hosts; what is plain and what is hidden; everything shall be revealed to thee by my grace and every word of thine shall be the truth and nothing but the truth. And as long as the mountains and rivers endure on the face of the earth, so long shall thy poem live amongst the children of men. And so long shalt thou also dwell in all my worlds." Having spoken these words Brahma vanished then and there.

On receiving the command and benediction of Brahma, the sage Valmiki set himself to explore and envisage the new world he was to body forth. In utmost purity and prayer he consecrated himself to the task. With senses indrawn and mind subdued he wrapped his spirit in fold upon fold of meditation. And plunging deep in Yoga he kindled within himself the flaming inner eye that beholds the mysteries of existence, even the eye of Dharma, that immutable law which builds up the worlds and governs alike the motion of the sun and the stars and the pettiest incidents of everyday life. And he visualised, on the whole and in every detail, the entire story of Rama and Sita and of Hanuman and Ravana and all the rest of them. And he saw them all even as they were in actual life, laughing and talking, grieving and enjoying, acting and interacting, but each treading his or her own straight or tortuous path in the vale of life. And only when the whole had fused itself in his mind into one glowing picture and was moving and breathing, did he begin to translate it into rhyme and word and sound. Thus indeed did Valmiki of luminous soul compose the great Ramayana, synthesising the fourfold norms of life, viz., desire, wealth, duty and final release; and it is even like the ocean, unfathomable; a veritable store-house of gems.

Having composed the Ramayana the poet bethought himself as to how he should publish it. Now there were in his hermitage Kusa and Lava, the two sons of Rama,

born there and bred up and educated by Valmiki himself. They were wise and beautiful beyond compare, and were learned in all the Vedas and Sastras, and their voices were divinely sweet and rich. Them Valmiki taught to sing the whole poem in the appropriate manner. So exquisite and perfect was their rendering and so deeply did they enter into its very spirit that its fame soon reached the ears of Rama himself. At his bidding his own sons whom he knew not then, recited before the assembled court the story of his own wondrous deeds.

Rightly understood, the account of the transformation of Valmiki, the Muni, into Valmiki the poet, may justly be regarded as one of the immortal stories of literature and history. Outwardly speaking, there seems to be a gulf, an impassable gulf, fixed between the life of the Muni and that of the poet. The Muni goes away from life. His is the life moral, contemplative, illuminated, and his chief instruments are the will and the intelligence upon which he imposes the yoke of a relentless discipline. What shall he do with the feelings and emotions? To him they are but a morbid excrescence which tends to deflect the current of the pure will and have therefore to be subjugated and outgrown.

The poet, on the other hand, flushes and quivers with every throb of life. He enters into and even hallows every form and phase of experience. His mind is a thousand-stringed lyre catching the trills and wails, the

sobs and peals of the human heart only to return them in poignant echoes. The feelings are the golden stuff of his workmanship.

Valmiki, through long strenuous years had doubtless achieved the perfection of the ascetic discipline and endeavour. But had he insisted on stilling his emotions into Nirvana? When he asks Narada to tell him of a perfect man, we hear a new cry, the cry of the feeling element in him seeking for its own heaven and beatification. His spirit was bathed in great new eddies of joy when he heard from the lips of Narada, of Rama the perfect man. In that frame of mind, he went out for his day's bath and for the first time in his life the touch of external nature quickens him like fingers of fire. Nature seems to him the translucent fairy raiment of the Lord. From every corner His face peeps and from every nook calls his wondrous flute! But alas! the divine Ananda is distilled out of the deadliest poison and none who shrinks from the latter can possibly drink of the former. Not without touching the feet of the Lord planted in the abysses, can man behold His face serene, lost in the cloud-lands of glory. And so it was that the arrow that whizzed from the hand of the hunter and found the heart of the bird, likewise hurled Valmiki from his precipice of giddy delight into a seething night of the soul wherein he plumbed the dumb agony of the world-heart. But the darkness soon shivered and burnt into the white light of a new day. The coming of Brahma, the creative spirit

is the sign and promise that the spirit of Valmiki in its recoil had tapped the very source and fountain-head of existence. And it is as if Brahma said to him, "My son, I know the balm for thy ailment. It will be cured only by song and new creation." The Primeval Poet, as Brahma has been called in the Hindu books, Himself summons Valmiki to recreate his personality as also the world in which alone it could live and move and have its being.

In the face and mien of the god-man and god-woman, Rama and Sita, that he has created, we can recognise something of the radiance with which he himself emerged from his perilous pilgrimage to the Source. And in Ravana, the ten-headed monster and Prince of darkness, can we not equally recognise the presence that haunted the secret chambers of night which Valmiki's spirit had to tread?

But who are these other shapes, friends, comrades, helpers, Hanuman and the monkey hosts? Where did Valmiki see them? Surely, in some world that interpenetrates our own.

But before these shapes and presences, Gods and demons, can be projected on an external canvas, they had first to be separated from Valmiki's own being and endowed with flesh and blood. This is the meaning of Valmiki betaking himself to Yoga before he produced his great poem.

The Ramayana is thus neither more nor less than the spiritual rebirth of Valmiki himself, a rebirth which is made permanent and imperishable by the expression. A poem so evolved is no mere ornament or decoration to life; it is the voice of life itself in all its profundity. It becomes a Sadhana for the human soul, a way of salvation and a star-built ladder of ascent to the supreme.

We should miss the whole significance of the story if we were to conceive of Valmiki as escaping from the dread reality of life into an Utopia peopled with shining phantoms and luminous shadows. "Every word of thy poem shall be true," said Brahma to him. The Poet is as much a creator of truth as of beauty. He releases by his song the very heart and core of existence. And the Ramayana, the age-long treasure of the Hindu people, may, if rightly used, prove the spiritual renewal of a world, torn in every limb, distracted to madness, clutching at shadows and wandering in a very night of the Gods.

2. THE THEME OF DIVINE INCARNATION

The theme of the Ramayana is absolutely the loftiest and grandest that any epic poet ever attempted. The revelation of the Supreme Divine in a human setting is the central aim of the whole story. The figure of Rama as the incarnate--Vishnu is woven through and through the poem and if this motif is torn out or treated as alien, the entire structure would crumble to pieces. But it must also be admitted that the picture promised to us in the Narada-Valmiki prologue was something very different. It was the perfect man and not incarnate God that we were led to expect. When Narada declared with authority that it was possible for man to be perfect here and now and that Rama had achieved the full-orbed perfection, we seemed to listen to the human hope and the human gospel in full-toned grandeur. And likewise we understood that the crown which crowned the head of Rama was for every single human being and not the privilege of a solitary individual descended from supernal realms.

At the very outset of the story therefore we are face to face with a puzzle aud a paradox, and the poet seems to commit a volte-face in starting his story at the divine pole of existence. Why, we ask ourselves, the God-man instead of the Man-God? It is not surprising that some have attempted to cut the gordian knot by the theory that a face of divinity has been superposed by some later hand on an older and decidedly human pattern. And there are

others who would hastily condemn the whole procedure as an outrage upon poetic art. Is it indeed so, or may there not be deeper factors in the light of which the seeming blemish should be reckoned as the high audacity and triumph of a diviner art? The question is of crucial importance and deserves careful study.

First of all let us not forget that in Narada's description of Rama, hints and touches abound which suggest that he is cast in divine proportions. Thus Rama has been likened to various Gods, to Vishnu, Brahma Dharma and so on. But likeness is not identity and the hiatus referred to already still persists.

The divinity of Rama may also be attempted to be justified by the characteristics and differentiæ of supermanhood. The supreme hero is one who incarnates the highest ideals which the human mind can envisage. The entire universe has in some sense to be the theatre of his action. Otherwise, he would be simply heroic and not the plenitude and perfection of heroism itself. The greatest hero cannot but be universal. He must of necessity transcend the limitations of time and space. The whole universe acts through him and flows through him. He is the spotless mirror in which the very heart and depth of existence are reflected. If all these characteristics are to be brought out in the character of Rama, the poet had perforce to adopt symbols and guises such as he has done.

Or we can look at the problem from still another point of view. When Valmiki asked Narada for a perfect man here and now, was he not asking for God himself in flesh and blood? And what is God but a name for that plenary perfection which we are fated to seek, which courts newer and newer definitions and seems to recede the more, the nearer we approach it. When man climbing out of mortality achieves (or thinks he achieves) the *summum bonum*, does he not in a sense become one with Divinity itself? The goal being posited as attainable, every single soul completing the journey may be regarded as an incarnation in the final stages of the march.

While considerations like these may reconcile us to Valmiki's delineation of Rama as an Avatar, the fact still stares us in the face that Rama is presented as an incarnation in a very different sense. He is not a mere human soul ascending into blessed regions after ages of struggle and effort, but he is the unique Divine who has descended from the realms of everlasting light and bliss out of his own infinite grace. It seems to us that the key to the solution of the problem is imbedded deep in the religious consciousness of man. In his effort to penetrate the cosmic mystery, man has erected many types and symbols of the Divine for adoration, such as the transcendental God, the immanent God and the personal God, not to mention many others lower down in the scale.

Clothed in the light of light and lost in the secrecy of secrecy, the transcendental God satisfies the human passion for the sublime. But spiritual Titans alone can wend their way to his shrine and to the ordinary eye his light is little distinguishable from darkness. The immanent God ministers to our passion for heroism. He plunges into limitation by an original act of self-immolation. He breaks himself into a myriad fragments and yet inhabits and ensouls each tiniest thing. The cosmic process is his passion-play and that wonderful hymn of the Rig-Veda, the Purusha Sukta, celebrates in mystic strains the glory of the primeval sacrifice by which the one became the many.

Both these conceptions leave unoccupied large areas of the human heart and it is precisely here that the personal God makes his throne. He is the indispensable link and mediator between the transcendental and the immanent God. Likewise is the personal God the mediator between God and man. It is His glory and not His defect that the personal God is made of the very stuff of which we are made. In His arm alone can the weary and heavy-laden find rest and solace. Doughty mariners of the spirit may plunge into the abysses of the immanent or plough the uncharted seas of the transcendental; the simple human heart craves the blissful touch of the living God alone.

The doctrine of incarnation appears full-blown in the Gita and presupposes a long antecedent history. The

epoch between the close of the ancient Upanishads and the rise of Buddhism—very imperfectly illuminated yet by historical research—seems to have been marked by great democratic movements in the evolution of Hindu religious thought and the gospel of the Buddha himself may have been only one extreme issue and form of the prevalent spirit. It was in that age that there grew up the beautiful and profound doctrine of Nara and Narayana, the human and the Divine soul. The supreme Brahman according to this School split Himself into two, viz., Nara and Narayana who together constitute a mystic unity in duality. They are ever engaged in bearing the burden of the worlds. Each needs the other for his fulfilment and fruition. God is as much compelled to seek man as man has to seek God. And where is man to be sought except on the earth? By inward necessity Narayana has to become Nara and give chase to man, however much he may seek to flee or fight his Divine pursuer. It may sound paradoxical, but nevertheless it may be true that the perfect man is but Narayana crucified. In other words the dynamic Divine is the human perfect.

We may remark in passing that there is nothing in the theory of incarnation which need exasperate the critical intelligence. The mystery of divine self-limitation will ever haunt us in every solution of the world problem.

The Ramayana seems to us to be the supreme evangel of the doctrine of Nara and Narayana. Not that

it is the product of any narrow sectarianism but that Valmiki sang from a sphere where he was face to face at once with the glory of God and the glory of man. And his poem becomes the gospel of God and man in one. The ascending soul of Nara and the descending soul of Narayana are but twin aspects of one truth and one reality. The perfect hero is a unity of Nara and Narayana. He is the fountain of Karma and grace. If Valmiki had merely painted Rama as a perfect man he could at best have evoked the image of a static divinity like Yudishtira or Bhishma in the Mahabharata whose light may warm but would not kindle. With magic insight he has chosen to paint the dynamic divine and to do so he had to start at the God-pole of existence. The whole of Hindu history bears witness to the soundness of the method adopted and Rama has hence become not merely a perfect man but a saviour and redeemer.

Nor can it be objected that the doctrine of incarnation shuts the door on human hope and perfectibility. It is rather the divine seal upon man's infinite possibilities. It would be equally a mistake to think that to an incarnation the pains and penalties of earth-life are no more than a dream and a play. The finer the organisation the more exquisite the suffering. The most delicate strings give out the most poignant notes and the grossness of human life falls upon the Avatar not lightly but ten-fold.

Let us rise to a higher plane still. God and man, eart and heaven, hero and Avatar, Rakshasa and Deva—what

are these but man-made partitions and barriers? Where does any one term of the pairs end and the other begin? Are we not walking in a labyrinth of words which are convenient symbols of what we want to suggest, but have to be discarded at a certain stage? And even those who look askance at God and religion may seek to understand Valmiki by supposing that he is speaking a particular art-language and no more. To overthrow all barriers and partitions; to empty the hosts of heaven upon earth; to swing wide the gates of heaven and invite all mankind to enter; to inform God with the human element and man with the Divine; to sing the marriage of heaven and earth; this and nothing less is the aim of Valmiki. Let us not be engrossed too much in the ritual; let us listen to the music itself.

3 THE BALAKANDA

Mythology and Poetry are twin sisters and have to use their own language of form and symbol in order to suggest truths and realities which are remote from our normal mind; and no race has evolved a more bewildering variety of myths than the ancient Hindu race. Absolutely the grandest of these myths is undeniably that of the eternal duel between the Devas and the Asuras, Gods and Titans. It runs like a seam through the entire structure of Hindu art and thought. The phenomena of day and night, the drama of the seasons, the cycles of evolution, the moral and spiritual drama of the individual life have all been sought to be rendered in terms of this central idea. Whatever its primitive roots, we find that even in the most ancient times it became a key turned on all doors, Adhibhautic, Adhidaivic and Adhyatmic. The conception of Deva and Asura has gone on refining and rarefying and if we conjure up child-like pictures of terror at the mention of the word Rakshasa in the Ramayana, we should be committing a criminal error. Modern scholars are agreed that the Vedic myth of the war between God and Titan permeates the Ramayana through and through, and they have sought to trace the main characters and leading features of the story to Vedic prototypes. We may also recall that one of the Dhyanaslokas prefixed to the Ramayana itself runs as follows:

वेदवेद्ये परेपुंसि जाते दशरथात्मजे ।
वेदः प्राचेतसादासीत् साक्षाद्रामायणात्मना ॥

"When the supreme Lord who can be known only through the Vedas incarnated as Rama, son of Dasaratha, the eternal Vedas also took shape as the Ramayana."

But we must remember that, in the hands of our poet, the myth of Deva and Asura has assumed proportions of grandeur and sublimity never attained before. If we look closely into every character of the Ramayana, animal, human or Rakshasa, there is a delicacy of touch, a profound psychological insight and an intensity of the personal life which makes them, each in his own way, a supreme person. The great myth of God and Asura is at the very white-heat of exaltation and expression.

To understand the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, therefore, there is need to understand and master the language of form and symbol which was the ancient inheritance of the poets who made them. Time was not so long ago, when European students of Indian art, repelled by what they considered the multiplicity of limbs of Hindu Gods, and Goddesses, dubbed the whole of Indian painting and sculpture as barbarous and grotesque. A deeper understanding, however, soon began to prevail and restored Indian Art to its rightful place as one of the supreme fruits of the human genius. A similar process of education, in the technique and devices of Hindu mythological forms is needed for the children of the west who are in tune with the Hindu mind if they are at all to see through the veil of a poem like the Ramayana.

We are very far from suggesting that the poem as a whole is but the product and figment of the imaginative genius of Valmiki. He himself tells us at the very outset that he is going to narrate, a great "Akhyana" connected with the royal family of Manu and Ikshvaku. No genius however great, can spin out so stupendous a creation out of the mere void. The great line of Ikshvaku and Raghu, at its highest point of efflorescence, must have given birth to heroes and heroines whose lives and deeds, must have seemed to their contemporaries, as the very forms and faces of the Divine. And the national mind must have gone on dreaming and brooding over them, till at last arose a mighty poet, who threw the whole story into forms and symbols and language of everlasting beauty. To the eye of faith—which Valmiki is able to kindle in his hearers more than most—Rama and Lakshmana, Sita and Hanuman and the rest of the great gallery are invested with more than objective reality. Still can the devotee see them, feel them, and talk with them if he has the requisite purity of heart and will. But even they who are devoid of such fervours of the heart may well enter through the Ramayana into a moral and aesthetic millennium, if only they find the right gate of approach.

With this initial clearing of the ground which seemed to us to be essential, we may proceed to the poem itself.

It is very remarkable that the Ramayana begins and ends—leaving aside the Uttarakanda for the moment—

with a grandiose picture of Utopia. The poet starts with a description of the glory that was Ayodhya, sovereign city of the Kosala kingdom. And so beautiful and grand is the description that it deserves to be ranked with the most brilliant gems of world-literature. Like a great anthem, it rises, note upon note, and melody npon melody till the whole seems to float in a very heaven of wonder and joy.

To Valmiki, Ayodhya is the very sanctuary of the earth; it is the eternal city of his dreams, *civitas dei*. He loses himself in its broad spaces and noble flower-strewn paths, its soaring mansions and gay pennons, the gorgeous magnificence of its buildings, and the beauty and symmetry that was visible even in the minutest detail.

And the city as a whole seemed as some fairy creation, even like the aerial car of the perfect Siddhas roaming in the skies. The lyric passion that speaks in every line of the description inevitably suggests, that the poet must have seen it realised in a large measure, somewhere, somewhen. But even regarded as an idealised picture it is profoundly significant of one of the elements of Valmiki's attitude to life. He is seeking to impress upon us, the great truth, that it is only in surroundings and environments of great beauty, that the life of man can put forth its fairest blossoms. The outer reacts upon the inner and stamps upon it, its own visage of ugliness or grace. We have only to think of

our mammoth modern cities, where humanity lies heaped and huddled in physical and moral swamps, to read aright this great lesson. But the city beautiful is only the base and bottom of the whole structure.

What about the bodies and minds and souls which Ayodhya housed and nurtured? Even grander is the picture that the poet draws of the human elements of the city. Perfect, and well-formed in limbs were they all, man and woman, alike; and in the entire length and breadth of the vast city, there was not a single ugly or deformed being. They had all the features and grace and symmetry of the Greek Gods. They wore beautiful attire and were decked in shining ornaments. Every home smiled with opulence and plenty and every house-holder had a rich store of worldly possessions. Poverty seemed to have been banished and none was there, who was stricken down by fate. It was as if a tidal wave of the very joy of life swept the city always and for ever. The arts and sciences had likewise penetrated into every nook and corner to such an extent, that every one in Ayodhya was a scholar and savant. Every mind was disciplined and there was not a trace of monopoly or privilege in the possession of the highest knowledge.

A human being may be perfect in body and have a plenitude of earth's stores; he may be a living encyclopaedia and yet may be on a level with the brute. The striving to exceed himself, the search for an ideal good

and truth, the thirst for perfection, it is this which gives man the soul. And Valmiki makes it wondrous clear that the citizens of Ayodhya, were not mere bodies and minds, but they were souls in the highest sense of the term. In the whole of Ayodhya one could not meet with a single Nasthika. The word connotes not atheism in the modern sense, but the absence of faith in some supreme principle, God, or soul or Dharma that abides forever and ever and is the centre and circumference of all existence. Crowning his description of the men and women of Ayodhya the poet tells us in a miraculous line :

सर्वे नराश्च नार्यश्च धर्मशीलाः सुसंयताः ।
उदिताः शीलवृत्ताभ्यां महर्षय इवामलाः ॥

"All the men and women of Ayodhya were wedded to the unswerving pursuit of the eternal path. They were robed in modesty and silence, and in exalted behaviour. High, uplifted in conduct and character, they were faultless and radiant like Maharishis themselves." No translation can reproduce even a shade of the infinite suggestiveness of the original. Never did a single verse concentrate purer ecstasy of utterance. This then is the high destiny that the poet promises for every individual man and woman, to become a Maharishi in this very life.

The head and crown of Ayodhya was its king, Dasaratha and his noble band of eight ministers, whose very names are poetic and suggestive to a degree. The primary importance of the kingly function has always been realised in Hindu India to such an extent that an

old adage runs:—Like king, like subjects." Even the visitations of nature were attributed to the lapses of the king. There is enough in the Ramayana itself to warrant the view that the Hindu king was anything but an uncontrolled autocrat and that the people had an honourable and potent voice in the affairs of state. But here, we are not concerned with systems of polity, nor with Valmiki as the apostle of any particular system like monarchy or democracy. We must also remember that Valmiki was weaving his pattern within the framework of his time and age. We are concerned only with the heroic stature of Dasaratha as king and individual. From the earliest times there has been a strong current of Indian thought, stressing the glory of the active life. The house-holder was exalted above the ascetic. And the king bearing upon his shoulders the burden of a household, vast and teeming as his kingdom, was considered, as the very incarnation of the active life at its highest point of intensity, and as carrying the noblest trust possible for man. And the ideal king came to be regarded as more of a hero, more of a sage and ascetic than the greatest devotee or saint or yogi. Dasaratha was an ideal king in this sense and was the very sun that lighted Ayodhya's firmament.

We may cast a glance at the salient features of Valmiki's Utopia. It is a mingling of human and divine elements in one. Man must drink his fill of the joys of earth before reaching his greatest heights. To

use the language of Hindu psychology, his Annamaya, Pranamaya and Manomaya kosas or sheaths must be developed to the full, before his soul can manifest its sublime glory. There is nothing even in the most advanced gospels of modern democratic humanism that need be regarded as any improvement on Valmiki's picture. The strident note of individualism as an end in itself is no doubt absent. But every sane thinker is bound to regard it as the voice of anarchy itself. True also, that the institution of caste is present in this Utopia but it is shorn of revolting features and is no more than a sovereign principle of social harmony. Valmiki's vision of a new earth, thus compares favourably with any other of its kind, ancient or modern. But his new earth is domed by a new heaven even more glorious. In the Vedic phrase, man is the son of mother earth and father heaven. Any scheme, which seeks to base man upon earth alone is foredoomed to failure and will only end in breeding a new race of monsters. In proportion as man succeeds in banishing from his view the stars and showers of heaven, in such proportion will the abysses below the earth rip open, and belch forth torrents of fire and flame.

But Utopias matter little by themselves. It is the passion which burns in the vision, and the eloquence and intensity that speaks in the expression, that make them sink deep into us. And it is here that Valmiki shines as the very overlord of the Utopian realm.

His purpose in confronting us with such a picture at the very opening is obvious enough. He keys our imagination to the highest pitch and prepares us for what is to follow. The description of Ayodhya is thus the facade of the great fane which is to house human gods and goddesses and as such it is nobly and exquisitely wrought.

The poet next presents us the picture of the great Ashvamedha or horse-sacrifice performed by Dasaratha, and in order to understand its place in the story, we have to glance at a certain unique conception in the Hindu view of life. In this view, every man who comes into the world, comes burdened with a five-fold debt, (sometimes it is stated to be three-fold.) He owes a debt to the Gods who keep the worlds going; he owes a debt to the Rishis, the inspired seers of knowledge; he owes a debt to his own ancestors whose love tingles in every drop of his veins: he owes a debt to human beings in general; and finally he owes a debt to all creatures in the world. Every man has in his life-time to pay off every one of these debts and he, who fails to do so, is held guilty of heinous sin. The debt to the Gods is redeemed by worship, vows, austerities, by everything in fact, which is the off-spring of the religious instinct in man. The second debt is discharged by study, discipline, knowledge and reverence. The third is discharged by begetting a son in the bonds of holy wedlock and continuing the line of the ancestors. The debt to

man has to be paid off by charity and gifts and unselfish deeds of every kind. The last and final debt has to be paid by feeding and cherishing the birds of the air and the beasts of the field. Only after paying off every one of these debts is any one free to pursue the call of his own soul. And the discharge of every one of these debts was reckoned a Yagna; and every man is of necessity obliged to perform the five great Yagnas. The word Yagna is often mistranslated as sacrifice. But really it means sacred action. The heart and essence of Yagna is Shraddha and Shraddha is that attitude of the mind and soul which is born of the commingling of faith, consecration, abstinence, austerity, adoration and holiness. And it regards the thing to be done as the highest end and aim open to a man. The conception of the fivefold sacrifice is one of the noblest and most comprehensive conceptions of human duty ever formulated. It reminds man of how inextricably his lot is interwoven with that of everything else in the world; and of how man has ever to keep before him this stupendous fact of interdependence. In a sense it is worship by man of the whole universe.

In the light of this conception we can understand how tortured in mind, a righteous and high-souled king like Dasaratha, must have felt when it seemed practically certain, that the illustrious line of Manu and Ikshvaku was to die with him. The fact of his being child-less was not merely a great misfortune to himself and his people,

it was a great sin, in that he had not succeeded in paying off his debt to his forefathers. Long did he brood upon this and had fruitlessly undergone many vows and hardships. And as the years passed by, the dread shadow of his moral failure lay like a lion in his path. After great searchings of heart, he resolved to celebrate the horse-sacrifice, which was the grandest, and most solemn means of purification and expiation, open to one who was a king. In theory at least this sacrifice could be performed only by an emperor who had conquered the four quarters; for, the gift or Dakshina for the sacrifice had to be the entire earth. But Dasaratha possessed this qualification being 'the supreme emperor of his day. But he trembled to think of the fateful results that might ensue from such a sacrifice, for, even as its rewards and results were surpassing and great, so were its potentialities for harm equally dire, inasmuch as the slightest fault in the *modus operandi* of the sacrifice would blast the sacrificer root and branch. Dasaratha himself was long past the prime of life and to hope for sons at such a stage was very near ludicrousness itself.

So he had to pass through a grave moral crisis before resolving on the undertaking; and when at last he did make up his mind, it was an act of the purest and most heroic faith. In some such sense we have to construe the bearing of the anecdote that Sumantra relates to Dasaratha about the ancient prediction by the sage Sanatkumara, of the birth of sons to Dasaratha.

In venturing upon so huge and mighty an enterprise Dasaratha was really inspired, as events showed, by the will of the Gods themselves. In things great and small, there is a human and a divine element and the Ashwamedha of Dasaratha has been conceived as the human counterpart and efficient cause of a divine intervention in cosmic affairs. And the lesson is brought home to us that each man by earnestly and sincerely striving to do his own duty, may prove himself to be the unconscious instrument of the universal will itself.

The story of the sacrifice is narrated by the poet in a simple and telling, yet superbly dramatic manner. From beginning to end, and stage by stage the sacrifice lives before us like some embodied person. We feel an intense pervading atmosphere of hushed solemnity and holiness. One feature of the sacrifice we ought to emphasise, and that is, the worship of man which was essential. Dasaratha had to receive, feed and entertain, thousands upon thousands of guests and visitors who had arrived on the great occasion. And he issued the strictest orders that every one, rich or poor, friend or stranger, Brahmin or Sudra, should be received, honoured and reverenced with equal regard and consideration. For, every guest was the representative of God himself and had to be looked upon to as such. To those, who fume with indignation at the ancient caste system, we would make a present of the

following passage from the description relating to the treatment of guests.

आवासा बहुभक्ष्यावै सर्वकामैरुपस्थिताः ।
पौरजानपदस्यापि जनस्य बहुशोभनम् ॥
दातव्य मन्नं विधिवत् सत्कृत्य न तु लीलया ।
सर्वैवर्णा यथापूजां प्राप्नुवन्ति सुसत्कृताः ॥

It was at the close and climax of the great sacrifice when the Gods had gathered on high to receive their allotted share of the offerings, that they began to take counsel with each other and with Brahma, the creator, as regards their deliverance from the insufferable yoke and thraldom of Ravana. In thus linking the sacrifice with the divine descent on earth, Valmiki displays, magical genius and insight. The Gods had long become, liveried lackeys in the service of Ravana, whose dread shadow lay athwart the three worlds. Innumerable wrongs had the Gods suffered at the hands of Ravana and they had been despoiled of all their glory and splendour. But why did they not seek a way out before? It is no doubt true, that the forces of evil should grow and grow and burst of their own bloated fulness only at the appointed hour. But still there is scope and need for instruments and cooperating factors. So grand was the Ashwamedha of Dasaratha, so heartfelt were the prayers and invocations and so holy was every detail connected with it that the Gods felt their divinity reviving and reasserting itself. In the ancient conception the Gods were supposed to be born and to grow

in the sacrifice itself. They lived only on offerings and prayers. The great secret is emphasised here that the Gods can have no existence or manifestation, apart from a worshipping will. God and worshipper are thus an inalienable duality, each requiring the other for life and expression. It follows, that in proportion as the seeking will is intense, in such proportion will the divine make itself manifest. And a perfect sacrifice like that of Dasaratha powerfully awakens the Gods to themselves, and becomes the rallying point of their resurgence and revolt.

At this point we hear from the mouths of the Gods themselves, the racking story of Ravana as they told in piteous accents their woes and wrongs to Brahma and Vishnu, entreating them to come to their rescue. The picture of Ravana is here presented only in brief though grand outline and the poet will afterwards enrich it with a dazzling hue and colour which will make him stand out as a figure of supreme moral significance. But even this first rough sketch has been done on a scale of impressive grandeur. One example will suffice. The line which says

नैनंसूर्यः प्रतपति पार्श्वे वाति न मारुतः ।
चलोर्मिमाली तं दृष्ट्वा समुद्रोऽपि न कम्पते ॥

In order to understand the Ramayana it is of fundamental importance that, even at the outset, we should strive to grasp the elements of the Ravana-conception. If we imagine that he is some spirit of darkness, per-

sonified and endowed with a frightful superfluity of heads we should be committing a disastrous error. On the other hand the Rakshasa spirit, has attained in him its highest level of sublimation. Firstly let us recall the Tapas of Ravana; never had any being achieved such miracles of asceticism and self-torture. Tapas in its elementary forms may be defined as the embracing of self-chosen suffering and hardship in pursuit of an ideal; it is the redeeming element, the heroic element, the very salt and savour without which life would putrefy and perish. Any will which is ready to immolate itself to the last degree in order to compass its end, touches the heroic point and in this respect Ravana had neither superior nor peer. He was therefore a hero amongst heroes. Secondly as a result of his superhuman austerity he had won from Brahma the boon of immunity from death at the hands of every order of being except man, whom he despised and cared not to take notice of. The deal for which he had undergone such anguish is now perceived to be that of physical and bodily immortality. He believed that mortal man was powerless to prevail against him, and that since he could not die at the hands of anybody else, he had won life everlasting. But the third element in the conception is even more significant. To what end did he turn the boon of immortality he had acquired? He strewed the worlds with rack and ruin. He reduced all orders of beings from the highest to the lowest, from Gods to men, to the most abject servitude. And especially did he deem that women were his natural

prey and were made only to minister to his wantonness and be his foot-stool. It is, therefore, clear that he had sought immortality not as an end in itself but as a means to another end, namely, power, irresistible, plenary and well-nigh omnipotent. Ravana therefore embodies power as the supreme ideal and to the extent that he embodies it perfectly, he becomes a supreme hero, in other words, a Super-man. We should therefore not confuse him with the giants and giant-killers of ancient legend, who in the language of Hindu psychology have not transcended the level of the Pranamayakosha. They are still in the stage where man is impressed by mere brute strength. But Ravana is a hero who is lifted far above this level; he soars high in the regions of the mind or Manomaya-kosha and is even touched by rays from higher realms. In fact we have to recognise that his ideal claims spiritual kinship with the great ideal of the superman of Nietzsche himself, and if he oppressed and trampled upon everything else, we must remember that to him strength was the only Dharma and weakness the only sin or adharma. And it was not so long ago that evolutionary biologists seeking to base morality upon evolution extolled the evolutionary process which weeds out the weak and the unfit as leading to a blessed goal. The moral vision of Ravana was something not very different.

But the ideal of power and strength alone is narrow and onesided, and if pursued with blind devotion, can result in nothing but world-catastrophe. Power is only

one of the Godheads that claim our allegiance. There are other God-heads like truth, beauty, love, poise who are equally noble and great and who will not abdicate their throne in favour of power alone. When all the diverse Godheads exist in harmonious fusion and concord then does the human soul attain to its complete wholeness. A hero like Ravana is at the egoistic stage of evolution. He regards all others, who exist only as material for his glorification. To him is not given the vision of the greatness of small things. He has climbed very high in the scale, but is still far short of the summit, where he will behold the self in all things and all things in the self. The stories of the Buddha's temptation by Mara and that of Christ's temptation by Satan powerfully embody the truth that the great pilgrims of the spirit have to pass through the country of the Titans before reaching their final end.

The Ramayana enforces the same principle in the characters of Rama and Ravana. Vishnu himself had to come down to overthrow Ravana and his great ideal, lest they should destroy the worlds for ever. In answer to the importunities of the Gods, Vishnu consented to become that puny and puerile man whom Ravana despised. Vishnu did not think that his own divinity would undergo forfeiture or diminution in the process. On the other hand he consented to such forfeiture for the sake of the worlds, human and divine. The contrast between the two ideals of the lopsided divinity of Ravana

and the full-orbed divinity of Vishnu could not be more forcibly illustrated.

Reading Valmiki's description of Ravana and his power over the very elements of nature, we cannot resist the temptation of remarking that it may even represent the memory of some great age of secularism in the dim past, which had harnessed nature to human use and made man feel that he was the one and only God. Such an age must have perilously resembled the age of modern secularism which has deluged the world in the blood and suffering of the two most demoniacal wars ever known.

It also seems likely that the idea of man alone being able to slay Ravana, is but another version of the Hindu idea that man alone could attain fullness of emancipation and that the Gods themselves, would have to take birth as men if they had to achieve the highest goal. No poet was ever so possessed of the vision of the glory of man as Valmiki.

The doctrine of the Bakthi school of Hindu religion must have already attained very great development before the Ramayana was composed. The idea of incarnation itself could have originated only in that school; and the characteristic doctrine of self-surrender to the Lord is to be met with in the Balakanda itself, where the Gods are stated to have taken refuge (Sarana) in Vishnu who in return bestowed upon them the pledge of Abhaya. The Lord is willing to go to the furthest lengths on behalf of the devotee and Vishnu therefore promised to be born

as man for the slaying of Ravana. For this purpose where could he find on the earth, a birth-place so hallowed as Ayodhhya or a father so heroic and high-souled as Dasaratha, or mothers so blessed as his three queens, Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi, who were in the language of the poet, radiant and perfect as the Divine Graces, Hri, Shri and Kirti themselves? Vishnu accordingly was pleased to take his birth from them. When the priests were engaged in the rite for procuring the birth of sons to Dasaratha, there emerged from within the blazing altar fire a mighty dæmon bearing in his hands a shining golden vessel. Step by step the poet has gone on creating from the beginning an atmosphere of the highest intensity which condenses at this point into a glorious being of matchless effulgence. In describing him, Valmiki performs one of his marvel-feats in the art of expression. We seem to behold a hovering transfigured presence whose every line and lineament strikes us with awe and wonder. The effect that the passage produces on us is due, as much to its own depth, and its weaving of word and epithet and sound and syllable, as to the luminous atmosphere in which it floats. There seems to be also a symbolism in every detail of the description which still waits for its unravelling.

The divine messenger duly delivers the golden vessel with its ambrosial beverage, and asks Dasaratha to give it to his queens saying that the drink would lead to birth of sons, and vanishes as mysteriously as he came.

Our imagination which has been lifted by the poet to such altitudes is still entranced in the trail of glory left behind by the departing messenger, and anon, the light-ocean in which the poem swims condenses once again and now we behold the divinely beautiful forms and faces of the four fairest children earth ever saw, Rama and Lakshmana and Bharata and Satrugna, who were no other than Vishnu himself born of Dasaratha's queens in a fourfold aspect.

When Vishnu graciously consented to take birth as the sons of Dasaratha, the creator Brahma bade the Gods raise children with the forms and faces of monkeys in order that they might help Vishnu in the struggle against Ravana. The Gods being devoid of the power of self-limitation possessed by Vishnu, could only raise off-spring and could not go down themselves. Accordingly the hills and dales, forests and mountains of the earth, soon became filled to overflowing with beings who, though they resembled monkeys in shape resembled their divine fathers in strength and might and wisdom. At this stage, we are confronted with one of the most baffling problems in the Ramayana, viz., the meaning and significance of the monkey legions as allies of the incarnate Vishnu. We can by an effort understand the Rakshasas, but seem to have no clue whatever to unravel the monkeys and consequently we feel repelled. The idea that when Vishnu goes down to earth, the Gods should surround him with help and

assistance is in itself very beautiful and commands immediate acceptance. But why should the Gods choose the monkey order in which to reproduce themselves and not any birds or other beasts? Why should they not have produced human off-spring, just as they are represented to have done, in the Mahabarata. All these questions are enigmas which we have no means of resolving at present. It may be that the answer lies in some chapter of mythlogy which was living and current at the time of Valmiki but which we have since lost in its entirety. A German scholar long ago suggested that the Vedic Vrisha-Kapi, who is considered to represent the Sun-God at the autumnal equinox, was the ancestor of Hanuman. If there be any truth in such a hypothesis we can only say that a gulf of development yawns between Vrisha-Kapi and Hanuman of the Ramayana. The late Sister Nivedita has formulated a theory that the monkeys of the Ramayana are survivals from what she terms "the animal epos of man." According to her, there was an early age of man's development when man looked upon birds and beasts as beings of supernatural power and wisdom and Valmiki has enriched his poem with the leading motives of that age, and in the process has conferred imperishable immortality on the epos itself. This probably comes very near the truth. In any event, at the touch of the great magician, Valmiki, the forests and mountains became chambers of enchantment and from them peep upon us mighty beings in monkey-masks, but veritable gods

within. The great art of Valmiki has imparted to the denizens of the woodlands a lovableness and grandeur all their own and there they wait impatiently to enlist under the banner of Vishnu for the great march against Ravana, King of Lanka. And when Vishnu arrives in their regions, their deep eyes will recognise him as human eyes cannot. And his sight will fling them into their wildest transports and release a mighty pent-up flood of divine energies.

The epic action commences at the point where the Rishi Visvamitra enters the council hall of Dasaratha just at the time when the latter is engaged in deliberating the marriage of his sons who have now reached the age of sixteen. When God becomes man and takes on himself the entire nexus of human limitations, his life on earth has to evolve strictly according to human laws and processes. He has to find his destiny and his destiny has to find him along human routes. Valmiki displays consummate genius in resisting remorselessly the vulgar temptation to make the life of his hero a series of miracles. Even to many advanced minds unless there is a touch of the miraculous about an incarnation, the faculties of belief will be sore-strained. Valmiki, however, does not belong to this category and makes Rama a man and nothing but a man. Such portions of the Ramayana as seem to import the supernatural element, divine weapons and so-forth, were not supernatural to Valmiki and men of his age, who believed in their possi-

bility. There can be no question of a miracle so long as it is believed to be within the reach of human power and compass.

It, therefore, redounds in the highest degree to the insight and vision of Valmiki, when he avoids miracle-mongering more or less completely and endows his heroes and heroines with the miracle of character and virtue and exalted heroism. Infinitely higher even than this is the other fact—startling and staggering if only we think about it—that Valmiki in unfolding the story of the incarnation makes it centre round a woman, the Divine Sita. Any body who is familiar with the story of the epic knows the paramount part she plays. Without her the incarnation of Rama and his brothers would have been a meaningless vanity. Not merely do they all pale into insignificance before her glory, but without her, they will be no more than beautiful statues or puppets who can do nothing and have nothing to do. We need not labour the point that the purpose of the incarnation is fulfilled only through a woman. In the Devi-Sukta of the Rig-Veda the great universal mother is made to speak as follows:

"I stretch forth the bow for Rudra, for the destruction of the deadly foe, who is spiteful against the Bhrammic power. I make battle for men, etc".

Thus, it is the Devi who is the real power in the slaying of Asuras and Rakshasas and it is her will that the various Gods obey. It is the self-same perception

that impels Valmiki to make Sita the heart and centre of his whole poem.

The descent of Vishnu as Rama and his brothers is little more than the descent of the Divine executive. But, where is the queen, the empress whose will they have to carry out? In the Gita, Sri Krishna when exhorting Arjuna to slay his foes says, "By me have they all been killed already, be thou the apparent cause of their killing." In the Ramayana itself in one place, it is already stated that Ravana has been slain by Sita's Tapas and that Rama will be but the apparent cause of his slaying. It is marvellous to think that the great power of the Devi celebrated in the Rig-Vedic hymn is translated by Valmiki in human terms into something, precisely its opposite and negative. The all-conquering might of the Devi, becomes in Sita, weakness, passivity, silence, the will to endure and suffer endlessly. And the Ramayana which apparently narrates the life-history of Vishnu's incarnation as Rama, becomes the revelation of a woman's soul; it is the greatest gospel that the world possesses of the true glory of woman and Valmiki in making her the very soul of his poem has displayed a sweep of vision of which no other poet has ever dreamed.

She upon whom so much depends—how and when did she make her advent on the earth and what heavenly choristers sang and danced in celebration of that mighty event! Apparently none knew of it and all unperceived

and unsung she has come down by a process which the poet himself dares not peep into. We may take it for granted 'that this silence is not due to any lack of reverence for her but rather to its very excess. Furthermore, in throwing such an impenetrable veil over the nativity and origin of Sita, the poet at the outset strikes the keynote of the true woman's character as he conceives of it. The true woman is and ought to be undemonstrative; she covers herself with a mantle of silence. Her glory lives in self-annihilation. We are simply told almost at the close of the Balakanda, that Janaka, king of Mithila ploughing a piece of land to purify it for sacrifice came across a beautiful female child in the bosom of the earth. The poet reveres her too much to make her even the daughter of woman, though he made Rama and his brothers born of Dasaratha's queens. She is the daughter of the earth, of the consecrated sacrificial ground, and mother-earth has yielded her by a process which is mystery itself. Ever since she has been growing up in the house of Janaka, loved as a daughter and adored as a Goddess.

But who is to achieve the critical event of uniting Sita and Rama in holy wedlock and fulfil the purpose for which they had come on earth? The great role devolves upon the Rishi Visvamitra, and reading the epic from end to end, we cannot but be impressed with the fact that the part allotted to Visvamitra is all-paramount and vital. From the moment he makes his

appearance till he leaves for the northern mountains at the close of the Balakanda, he dominates and fills the stage to the exclusion of almost every one else. In his presence even Rama becomes little more than a radiant and beautiful boy, looking up with wondering eyes and infinite trust upon the almighty sage. The story of Visvamitra and his superhuman achievements in the path of asceticism and self-perfection is narrated in strains of the utmost epic grandeur at the close of the Balakanda itself. But long before we read that account we have seen him face to face, we have heard his voice like that of the deep calling unto the deep and we have been engulfed in his titanic presence.

Even an incarnation requires a Guru, a herald and a path-breaker and Visvamitra plays a threefold part in the epic. He is the chosen Guru of Rama, he is also his devotee, the first and greatest of all, and he is the path-breaker who knows what he is and the mission he has to accomplish, and he sets Rama on the path that will lead him to his goal and he ties the first fateful knots of his destiny. Though the country teemed with countless sages of high renown, to Visvamitra alone on that day was it given, to recognise the divinity of Sri Rama; and from his life we can understand that he was far more fitted for the task than anybody else. He had already earned the proud title of Visvamitra or the friend of the world and throughout his life he had been ready to fling away the fruits of the hardest Tapas in

order to save others. There was in him in a very extraordinary degree the element of the Bodhi-Sattva as conceived by the Buddhists. He had, therefore, a spiritual sensitiveness that enabled him to enter into and feel as his own the agonies of the cosmic heart, trampled upon by Ravana, And when a great event of world redemption was planning itself and taking shape as Rama, he alone had the depth and intuition of soul to sense and perceive it even at the earliest stages. Plunged as he had been into the recesses of self-realisation, on the sacred banks of the Ganges in the heart of the Himalayan regions, he heard a call, the call of the world aching for redemption, and down he came to the plains and made his abode in holy Siddhasrama, where Vishnu had engaged himself in Tapas, in ages past. From that Ashrama had Vishnu issued in his incarnation of Vamana to deprive Bali of the sovereignty of the worlds and restore it to the Gods. Visvamitra's coming to Siddhasrama is unmistakably eloquent of the fact that once again had Vishnu taken birth and that once again he would go forth to overthrow the Asuras. From Siddhasrama had Visvamitra now come to the court of Dasaratha with his own scheme to set Rama on the path that would lead to Lanka.

In dramatic language, he is the "Deus ex Machina;" he is the Divinity that shapes our ends. But we cannot too strongly realise the fact that in this, there is nothing supernatural. Anywhere and everywhere destiny

is seen to be composed of two strands. human and divine, one which motives and is motivated by our own efforts and will, another which is independent and exists in its own sovereign right.

But this unpredictable, uncontrollable agency has to operate only through the human element; it lies in waiting by the roadside, watching for its opportunity, and taking advantage of our own virtues and failings, it exalts or casts us down. This lesson is read to us very impressively in the great scene between Visvamitra and Dasaratha in the latter's court. The scene itself is managed by the poet with extraordinary dramatic power and Visvamitra burns himself into our minds in the first debut itself. Dasaratha welcomes him with the reverence due to so great a 'Rishi' and declares himself ready to do whatever the sage commands. But when Visvamitra asks that Rama should be sent with him to guard his sacrifice against the Rakshasas for ten days and nights, Dasaratha stands aghast and is torn in a racking conflict of duty. He had given his word that he would do anything that the sage commanded, and he had given his word not at set purpose or premeditation, but naturally and even casually. Anybody in the position of Dasaratha would have spoken the self-same words in welcoming so rare a visitor. But it is not given to man, still less to a king, to go back upon words uttered even in conventional courtesy. Dasaratha had therefore to keep his word: but to him it meant the

deliberate sacrifice of Rama. It looked like throwing a lamb to the wolves. The struggle of Dasaratha caught in such a vortex is described by the poet with wonderful pathos which enlists our sympathy on the side of Dasaratha. When Visvamitra proceeded to disclose that Maricha and Subahu who had defiled his sacrifice were the henchmen of Ravana it was apparent that Visvamitra wanted Rama to twit and defy Ravana himself, and Dasaratha felt justified in giving a blank refusal to Visvamitra. The latter therefore vented a suppressed curse on Dasaratha for violating his pledged word, and Vasishta had to intervene and persuade Dasaratha, that Visvamitra was too great to be mistrusted and that under his care, Rama was not likely to suffer any harm. Having thus gone through a terrific struggle Dasaratha gladly consented to part with Rama. What is important to notice is that the whole moral of the story is pivoted on the words that Dasaratha had spoken in welcoming his guest and that without them, Visvamitra, however mighty in himself, would have been powerless to prevail.

Again we cannot but be struck with the fact that Dasaratha is the first victim to be offered at the altar of the Gods. In being blessed with Rama as son he had unwittingly planted within his heart a deep cross. The purpose of the Gods requires that Rama should be sent with Visvamitra and again later on it requires that Rama should be banished

to the forests at the word of Kaikeyi. On both occasions Dasaratha's truth was at stake and he had to safeguard it at the cost of his heart in the first instance and at the cost of his very life in the next. The heroic sacrifice of Dasaratha is thus the first great note of pathos struck in the poem but it mingles with the sublimity of truth upheld and maintained.

The journey of Rama and Lakshmana with Visvamitra from Ayodhya to Siddhasrama and from Siddhasrama to Mithila was in truth the most romantic and blissful chapter of Rama's life on earth. It was the period of the birth of his self-consciousness, when he awoke to a sense of his mission and imbibed the inspiration necessary to carry it out.

From the beginning of the journey till its destined end in Mithila we are in the grip of a sweet and solemn spell which grows and deepens with every moment. The poetic art of Valmiki is Sattvic in the highest degree and baffles all attempts at unravelling its secret. It has its own pace and measure and seems to steal noiselessly along, occasionally crystallizing into fairy patterns that plumb unfathomable depths of he soul. He has the unique art of awaking a flood of emotions by a single touch or suggestion. No where is there any striving for effect or manipulation of artifice. The one law that it observes is the law of sincerity. The poet has become one with his theme and is swept along the high tides of its divine afflatus.

While all these characteristics hold good of Valmiki's description of the march from Ayodhya to Mithila, we can still try to disengage and bring into relief the more salient elements that conspire to produce so grand an effect. First of all there is the personality of Visvamitra himself which seems to grow in stature during every moment of the long journey.

In the great scene at Dasaratha's court, we sensed his solar illumination and were likewise awed by his infinite explosive power. But as soon as he leaves Ayodhya behind and enters the forests, leading Rama and Lakshmana behind him, he reveals himself as altogether a new being. He has to play the parts at once of Guru and devotee of the incarnate Lord. He is now all serenity and repose, all benignity and love. He covers Rama and Lakshmana with tender and caressing affection and he stands rapt and hushed before them, lost in the consciousness of the priceless privilege that had fallen to his lot. The love of the Guru for the disciple is greater than that of the father and greater than that of the mother, for it is the love of the soul for the soul. It is very remarkable that throughout his relations with Rama he does not even once proclaim him as an incarnation. Even in Dasaratha's court, when he solemnly declared, "Verily I know the greatness of Rama whose truth is his prowess," he spoke only in hints and whispers. Vasishtha himself in spite of all his greatness could only dimly perceive the purport

of his words. He was too near Rama to behold his glory. It is equally noteworthy that Visvamitra never once talked to Rama about Ravana nor about the great mission that he had to accomplish before he could uproot that scourge of the worlds. His method is entirely different. He sets himself to awaken the sleeping self of Rama which once awakened would compass everything else in its own good time. In order to do this, Visvamitra dons the spirit of utmost stillness and covers his every foot-fall, till he seems to become a voice without a form and an elusive spirit without a body.

Let us here give one illustration. Rama and Lakshmana are sleeping on a bed of grass on the bare earth on the fragrant Sarayu banks. The eastern horizon has put on the first blush of dawn and Visvamitra awakes the sleeping princes in the following words :—

कौसल्या सुप्रजा राम पूर्वा सन्ध्या प्रवर्तते ।
उत्तिष्ठ नरशादूल कतव्यं दैवमाह्निकम् ॥

"Awake, Oh Rama thou blessed child of Kausalya! Arise! Oh thou tiger among men! The hour for performing the devotions of the morning twilight is at hand." Those who have read the original and have entered into its spirit are aware that the poetic art here has achieved in the simple rolling words a triumph to which it is difficult to find another parallel. Never did poet succeed in concentrating into one single verse, such ecstasy and white heat of the purest emotion. Scions of the first imperial house in the world, and accustomed to

the silks and splendours of royal chambers, Rama and Lakshmana still had the humility of soul to think the bosom of mother earth a sacred bed. In their reposeful features and closed eyes there was a new beauty not witnessed during the day. But the blissful features concealed within them the strength and power that could destroy worlds. The sage has been keeping night-long vigil with the stars overhead by the bed of the sleeping princes and gazing ever and anon at their radiant faces in a very dream of rapture. And to him it seems that the whole world and the stars and skies are standing motionless and entranced round this holiest of spots. The sleeping forest is astir with the first signs of reviving life and the eastern horizon is tinged in the dancing hues of the approaching sun. And this seems to be emblematic of the new sun that will soon rise and dispel the Ravana-darkness. The verse brims and overflows with suggestions. Language attains its highest potency only when its echo is infinitely greater than its sound, and the verse in question is a supreme example of this highest reach.

Next to the personality of Visvamitra, the second element that we have to stress is in the subtle weaving by the poet, of nature into the moving picture. Throughout the journey Visvamitra and his proteges were in living touch with the grand and the beautiful, the gentle and the peaceful, the wild and anarchic aspects of nature. The poet however does not cast any

eye except now and then on nature for her own sake; he brings her in only as a deep background of vastness and mystery. We are perpetually aware of a lingering, whispering presence which unveils itself only at the great moments. That ancient Hindus were great lovers of nature goes without saying, so much so indeed that it has been aptly remarked that the holiness of nature is the fundamental thought of Hindu culture. Rivers and mountains, forests and seas, earth and heaven have ever been looked upon with the deepest veneration as symbols and images of the Divine. The rishis of old installed their asylums in the heart of the woods and forests where the face of nature shone upon them as the face of God himself. Their retreats symbolised the marriage of the inner and the outer, and that attunement with the deepest self in nature, which transformed even the wild creatures and made the lion and the lamb drink fraternally at one pond. The path of Visvamitra and Rama was strewn with many a hermitage famous in myth and legend and it is not surprising that the poet should make of them immortal landmarks on the route. But apart from these greater descriptions, touches abound which serve to rivet our attention more forcibly on the internal. Thus when the party is across the Ganges on a boat, they hear a deafening booming din from within the bosom of the waters. It was nothing else than the hymn of joy sung by the great rivers Sarayu and Ganga as they mingled in confluence not far away. Visvamitra pointing this out to Rama asks him

to bow in adoration to the phenomenon. Crossing the Thataka wilderness, Rama felt, all of a sudden a delicious and caressing touch in the air ; it was the peace and aroma of Siddhasrama diffusing itself for leagues around. And lifting his eyes Rama beheld in the dim distance a hovering cloud of darkish green and the deer gamboled and the birds warbled as if in joyous welcome. One of the tensest moments of the story occurs when on the eve of departing for Mithila, Visvamitra bids his last pathetic farewell to Siddhasrama. Addressing its trees and birds and the deer and the sylvan spirits, he exclaims, "Verily here have I attained my goal and I leave ye all, bound for the northern mountains, peace and bliss be to ye all." But as he went forth, the birds and the deer followed him a long way till the sage had to turn them back. Once at least the poet allows himself to be possessed wholly by nature. Visvamitra and Rama and Lakshmana and their companions are spending a night on the banks of the river Sone and Visvamitra narrates the great story of his own family to the eager listeners. Insensibly the hours had glided into midnight and the sage burst out in the following passage :—

निष्पन्दास्तरवः सर्वे निलीना मृगपक्षिणः ।
नैशेन तमसा व्याप्ता दिशश्च रघुनन्दन ॥

शनैर्वियुज्यते सन्ध्या नभो नेत्रैरिवावृतम् ।
नक्षत्रतारागहनं ज्योतिर्भिरवभासते ॥

उत्तिष्ठति च शीतांशुः शशी लोकतमोनुदः ।
ह्लादयन् प्राणिनो लोके मनांसि प्रभया स्वया ॥

नैशानि सर्वभूतानि प्रचरन्ति ततस्ततः ।
यक्षा राक्षससङ्घाश्च रौद्राश्च पिशिताशनाः ॥

"Motionless are the trees, the birds are deep in the nests and the beasts in their lairs. Dense darkness envelopes the regions. Oh Rama, pride of Raghu's race, the first half of night gently prepares to depart and the skies beckon and blazon with a myriad eyes. Now the moon, that gladdener of the hearts of all, rises and brightens the gloom with her first gentle rays, the beasts of prey wander here and there as also the hosts of Rakshasas and Yakshas." As a transcript of the scene of midnight the passage would be hard to beat and in the context of the story it produces an over-powering impression.

The third element in the narrative consists of the legends and myths that the poet narrates through the mouth of Visvamitra. They form the teaching he imparts to his pupils. The teachers of old spoke in parables, but Visvamitra spoke in myths. Analysing them we find that they relate either to the previous incarnations of Vishnu or to the deeds of Rama's own ancestors or to Visvamitra himself. Whatever the origins of these legends, they had undergone a long process of development and in the form in which we meet them in the Balakanda, they are great stories of human aspiration and achievement. No doubt, there still clings to them the mythological element, but without it

they cannot be wholly divested of their earthly element and invested with the maximum appeal.

We hear the story of the great Asura, Bali, recognising in the dwarf before him, the all-compassing Vishnu himself, come to dethrone him from the sovereignty of the worlds and yet rejoicing that he should be the recipient of such grace. Or it is the mystic story of the churning of the ocean by the Gods and demons into which the ancient Hindus have put so much of their thought and wisdom about the universe. Yet again it is the marvel of Ganga's descent from heaven and the digging of the ocean itself by Rama's heroic forbears. Nor can we ever forget the gem-like tale of the hundred beautiful daughters of King Kusanabha tempted and persecuted by the Wind-God and triumphing in the end by their own stainless purity. Listening to such stirring recitations from the mouth of Visvamitra what could Rama and Lakshmana do but lose themselves in very beatitude !

The outstanding impression left on our minds by reading Valmiki's description of the journey from Ayodhya to Mithila is that the poet has succeeded in erecting a shrine with nature as walls, and the over-arching heaven as dome. The deity within is Rama and the high-priest is Visvamitra himself, and day and night within the temple, there goes on the reading and chanting of the holiest of puranas.

We are now in possession of the great keys that served to unlock the inner being of Rama, where Narayana himself was enthroned. First there was the love and devotion poured out by Visvamitra upon his divine pupil. Second there was the boundless reverence and trust of Rama himself towards the Rishi. Thirdly there was the quickening touch of nature and to these was added as a fourth element the stimulus of the heroic tales. The result was that in the space of little more than a fortnight, Rama grew in divine stature to such a degree, that his very sight was sufficient to liberate Ahalya from her age-long imprisonment of body and spirit.

But there occurred in the course of the journey two incidents which deserve special treatment inasmuch as they bear on the future development of the story. They relate respectively to Rama's encounter with Thataka in the forest and with Maricha and Subahu later on, during the sacrifice of Visvamitra in Siddhashrama. One may wonder that a great hero like Rama should begin his career with the slaying of a woman, demoness though she was. The poet takes particular care to banish the last trace of sentimentality from our hearts, by drawing a lurid picture of the ruin and desolation wrought by Thataka. She is presented to us as the embodied shape of terror and ruthlessness. She had turned a rich smiling country into a howling wilderness, whose every aspect was calculated to paralyse and petrify one with

horror. Visvamitra himself adjured Rama again and again not to flinch on the ground that Thataka was a woman. Nothing in all the world can be so evil as an evil woman.

Valmiki's delineation of Thataka is certainly reminiscent of cannibalism but to regard her figure as that of a mere cannibal would be to commit a fatal error. She is invested in the Ramayana with profound moral significance. She was not always a Rakshasi. Her Rakshasa form and nature were, as we learn from her story, an inversion of her violent passion for the sage Agastya. She has in truth fallen from grace. Like all Rakshasas she has formidable powers. Reading the accounts of the encounter between Rama and Thataka we are struck by the fact that it is more an encounter between minds than between bodies. Again and again Thataka seeks to bewilder Rama, to rob him of self-possession and throw him off his guard. It was no mere display of brute strength that she indulged in. The terrific roars, she emitted, the gusts of dust she raised, the showers of stones she rained and the illusions she practised were calculated to test Rama's nerves and spirit and were very far indeed from the methods of the primitive cannibal and Rama had at last to overthrow her by the exercise of the highest mental power. But before doing so he hesitated again and again and would fain have spared her life, but she was implacable and rushed upon her doom. We are told that as soon as Thataka was slain

the aspect of the forest changed as if by magic, and everything became as beautiful as it had been loathsome before. Reading this we are inclined to think that the whole scene had been conjured up by Visvamitra in order to put Rama to a supreme mental and moral test before imparting to him the divine weapons the wielding of which depended on mastery over the mind.

Be that as it may, Rama meets Thataka at the threshold of the Rakshasa-world which he has come to uproot. We may in this connection remind ourselves that the ancient Greeks represented the Furies as women. Thataka seems to stand for the raging tearing aspect of nature, of nature in her naked form "red in tooth and claw" and every wayfarer on the path must meet her cry of challenge if he is to pass on.

Soon after, Visvamitra initiates Rama in all the divine weapons he knew and thus equips him for the war with Ravana, though Rama himself was far from being aware of it at that stage. Reaching Siddhasrama Visvamitra commences his sacrifice while Rama and Lakshmana keep ceaseless vigil. On the sixth day Maricha, Subahu and other Rakshasas make their appearance intent upon defiling the sacrifice. Rama aimes at Maricha one of the milder astras which he had learned from Visvamitra and hurls him into the sea. But Subahu and the others he slays. Once again the poet is pointing to the moral that man is the instrument of his own fate. Valmiki does not tell us why Rama

spared Maricha ; it may be because that was the first occasion of Rama exercising a divine weapon and therefore he chose a merciful one or it may be because Maricha was the son of Thataka whom he had already slain. But the circumstance is destined to play a great part in the story for Maricha becomes the golden deer that helps Ravana to abduct Sita. Now had Rama shot his first bolts into the Rakshasa world and their whizzing would reach the ears of Ravana himself. Visvamitra had set the wheel of destiny in motion, all unknown to Rama.

In all literature, there is nothing more tender, more exquisitely pathetic, or more magically simple and perfect, than the story of Ahalya and her redemption by Rama as told by Valmiki. It seems to be the very lyric cry of the human soul and we need hardly say that man himself in his passionate moments, tends to become unmistakably feminine. The poet here soars into one of his greatest flights and suffuses his canvas with such deep shadows and dazzling delicate tints, that the picture as a whole, seems to cast back a beam of light on all that has gone before it. It is a fit prelude to the next great movement in the plot, the marriage of Rama with Sita. In the guise of telling of a woman's fall and absolution, the human soul itself is laid bare, with its incomparable grandeurs and precipitous falls, its pangs of self-renewal and its crowning promise of the beatific vision. And yet the story is intended to have a supreme

significance for the feminine soul in special, whose mission it is to be not merely the queen of beauty but the annointed priestess of snow-white purity and holiness.

But who is Ahalya and what does she stand for? Scholars say that Ahalya is none other than the Goddess of the Dawn to whom the Rig Veda dedicates some of its most wonderful hymns, and Valmiki's story is regarded as a Dawn-myth. If that be so, we can only say that it has been here transformed out of recognition. In the Rig Veda the Sun and the Dawn—besides others—are carried away by the Panis and the Vritras and hidden in a rock and have to be delivered from their clutches by Indra after a battle royal. In the Rig Veda, Indra is depicted as a mighty hero and there is no suggestion in his character of lewdness and moral culpability such as we find in the epic account. Gautama again must be regarded as the sun-god himself. In the Veda the sun and the dawn are both carried away by force and share a common captivity. We need not labour the point further.

Gautama and Ahalya are both human figures in the Ramayana. The former is an ascetic whose inner power was so rapidly growing that Indra in self-preservation felt compelled to put it down. The latter is but a woman whose beauty maddened Gods and men. Neither Ahalya's unrivalled beauty, nor the fact that she was the wife and partner in the dedicated life of so effulgent a sage as Gautama, proved any

safeguard against the onset of temptation. Rather these twinfactors themselves conspired to bring about her downfall and in a real sense Ahalya fell a victim to Gautama himself, inasmuch as it was the latter's power that Indra wanted to curb by seducing his wife; but this in no way mitigated her own fault. Indra had indeed come in the guise of Gautama himself, but Ahalya recognised him instantly for what he was and felt overwhelmed by the consuming passion of hidden fires; she thought herself blessed in having the illustrious king of the Gods himself for her suitor. Neither did she betray the slightest pang of remorse at having so completely forgotten herself and her duty to the great sage who was her husband. Thus her fall was a wilful and wanton act of surrender which invited and deserved the terrible doom that Gautama pronounced upon her. Valmiki gives us the clue to her attitude in a dainty half-verse:

कृतार्थास्मि सुरश्रेष्ठ गच्छ शीघ्रमितः प्रभो ।

The curse invoked by Gautama over his fallen wife and compressed by the poet into a few verses of concentrated sublimity requires more than a cursory glance. On the surface it looks like Ahalya being simply petrified, but inwardly it is the expression of the deepest Yogic trance with the gaze plunged wholly inward. Every characteristic mentioned in the verses is the mark of the Yogi. For long ages had Ahalya to abide insensitive even as a piece of stone seeing none and seen by none. Ahalya's is perhaps the

unique instance in Hindu Literature of a woman being thus engulfed in solitary meditation for untold periods.

In all spiritual deliverance, there is an appearance of something sudden and cataclysmic, though in truth it is only the final step of a long-drawn and arduous preparation. This accounts for the element of startling surprise at the way in which Valmiki springs upon us the Ahalya episode just at the moment, when Visvamitra and Rama set foot in the groves of Mithila. When the mirror becomes burnished, bright and spotless, the sun sails in of his own accord eager to behold in it his own reflection. And Valmiki strains even his vast resources in order to suggest to us the wonder of the meeting between Rama and Ahalya. Her beauty was already such that she was the master-product of the creator's art. But now as she emerged out of her long immurement there was in it an effulgence that had not been there before. In the words of the poet she was now

तपसा द्योतितप्रभां—तपोबलविशुद्धाङ्गी—

Everything earthly and material and carnal had been burnt out of her, every limb of hers was now bathed in the eternal founts and irradiated the splendour of the spirit itself. As we read her description by the poet, we are forcibly struck by the feeling that if the inconceivable is to be conceived and the inexpressible is to be expressed, it can only be by means of language such as Valmiki has used.

Face to face with Ahalya, what did Rama do? Did he exhort her or bless her in self-righteousness? Far

from it; he only imprinted on her feet the seal of his head in salutation. Has man ever dreamed of the exalted glory of womanhood in this wise?

It is no accident that makes the poet confront us in the Balakanda with three types of woman viz., Tataka, Ahalya, and last of all, Sita. Do they not stand for the three types—Tamasic, Rajasic and Sattvic? The first type admits of no salvation, it has to be slain by the Lord. The second type errs and succumbs but has in it the seed of an innate perfection. Ahalya has to be subjected to endless torment and crucifixion as the price of her resurrection. The third redeems the redeemer himself and her the Lord weds in mystic union.

Ahalya has therefore a representative significance of the highest intensity. Even as she was the fairest woman God ever made, so had she to undergo an age-long agony, not meted out to any other woman. Hers was also the sweetest sin woman ever committed, for it was with the king of the Gods himself. The unregenerate Ahalya is here, there and everywhere, filling the world with laughter and song, tragedy and tears and she it is who walks through the pages of modern fiction in protean forms. Upon all such, the light of Ahalya has to fall if they are to rise out of their dead selves. Ahalya is in truth, the Vicar-woman who took upon herself the whole burden and frailty of woman and made atonement for all womankind. Therefore it is that in Hindu eyes, she is one of the five gems among women—the rest being

Sita, Tara, Mandodari and Draupadi. And every Hindu woman in the days before she was invaded by modern enlightenment used to invoke her name at the first peep of every dawn. We can also now understand the place of the Ahalya episode in the story of the Balakanda; the slaying of Tataka and the redeeming of Ahalya were the very credentials that Rama had to carry if he was to claim the pearl of great price—the hand of Sita.

Valmiki who touches the height of romance in the Ahalya episode becomes almost matter-of-fact in his account of Sita's wedding. He conceals Sita as in a sanctuary and prefers that she should unveil herself in the course of events. Only a touch here and a touch there reveal that Sita is enshrined in the inmost heart of the poet. In resolving to bestow her only upon one who could wield the great bow of Siva, Janaka had devised a test which, humanly speaking, could only end in Sita remaining a virgin. Who could bend the great bow of Siva except the great God himself or some one equally great or greater still? Thus once more do we behold the operation of the law that the human will moves in mysterious accordance with the divine will even in its freedom. The power that broke the bow and the power that liberated Ahalya were only two facets of one reality.

The description of the marriage itself contains nothing remarkable except the immortal adjuration spoken by Janaka in bestowing Sita upon Rama. In the

fewest possible words it expresses the great ideal of the Hindu marriage. Janaka said:—

“इयं सीता मम सुता सहधर्मचरी तव।
प्रतीच्छ चैनां भद्रं ते पाणिं गृह्णीष्व पाणिना।
पतिव्रता महाभागा छायेवानुगता सदा।
इत्युक्त्वा प्राक्षिपद्राजा मन्त्रपूतं जलं तदा॥”

Marriage is not the union of flesh with flesh, nor even a comradeship of kindred souls on life's thorny path. Rather it is the transcendence of body and mind by subjecting them to the yoke of Dharma, the eternal and immutable law. From root to fruit it is governed by Dharma alone. Both man and woman find their fulfilment only in this path which has to be trodden on four feet and not two only. Dharma itself, so to speak, is compounded of a male and a female element, of the power that achieves and conquers and of the love that saves and heals. The tie of marriage is therefore indissoluble and through good and evil, weal and woe it grows only the faster. The wife indeed has to look upon the husband as her deity and cling to him like his very shadow. In all this, however, there is no question of inferiority or superiority; but the acceptance of the fact that only when one finds something living and tangible in which to lose oneself can one reach one's own highest fruition. In all worship, it is the sincerity and depth of the worship itself that matters and not the worth of the thing worshipped. Even basest depravity may be transformed as by magic if only treated with requisite reverence. Having brought about the marriage and accomplished his mission, Visvamitra departed to lose

himself once more in the eternal snows, and nevermore during all the mighty events that shook Rama's life did he ever return to the world. Verily was he the supreme master of detachment.

The humbling of Parasurama followed soon after and Rama stepped into the undisputed sovereignty of the hero-realm.

Valmiki devotes the last pages of the Balakanda to drawing a moving picture of the golden sunset that seemed to illuminate the evening skies of Dasaratha's life. Following the marriage of Rama with Sita he seemed to have attained the end and limit of human desires here below. The point of interest in this picture is the stress laid by the poet on the surpassing devotion to father, mother and other elders (Pithru Bhakti, Mathru Bhakti and Guru Bhakti) displayed by Rama and his brothers. India alone has dreamed of evolving a religion out of the relationships of life itself. The tie between father and son, mother and son, husband and wife, brother and brother, friend and friend, teacher and disciple, master and servant, every one of these by being infused with the appropriate spirit of consecration can be made a means of the highest realisation. We can look upon God as father, mother, lover, child, friend and so on; likewise we can look upon father, mother, friend, child and others as God. The two attitudes are complementary and only their combination can endow religion with fulness and reality. By emphasising the filial devotion of Rama, Valmiki is giving prominent expression to this truth. Another point

of interest in the description is the unrivalled ascendency gained by Rama in the affections of the people, for this will give an edge of sharpness to the wrench felt by the whole kingdom, when afterwards Rama is banished to the forests at the word of Kaikeyi. We may also note the departure of Bharata from Ayodhya, for on this casual absence of his, much will depend in the sequel. The picture as a whole is intended to be a background of light to the shades that soon were to fall.

The Balakanda closes on a truly ecstatic note inspired by the seraphic wedded love that subsisted between Rama and Sita. In a few perfect verses the poet outlines, how Rama and Sita grew into each other with the passing days, till in the end, they became one soul in twin bodies. It is the wedlock of love and duty, beauty and virtue, nature and spirit, that the poet celebrates in this wondrous vignette. This wedlock may take place on earth or in heaven; here, it is on the earth. Coming as the glorious consummation it is intended to remind us, that every step of the poem from the beginning has been leading only to this one end, viz., the perfect fusion of the soul of man and the soul of woman, as illustrated by Rama and Sita.

The poet started with the very grandest of themes undertaking to unfold the life-story of the incarnate God. For the purpose, his muse had constantly to wing in the highest heavens and strike note upon note on the wonder chords of the human spirit. Thus only could God be endowed with flesh and blood and the divine

lineaments made dear and intimate to us. In a seemingly haphazard fashion the poet laid his hand on this material and that, but his unswerving aim has throughout been to create a sense of the great expanses of space and time. and to build a stage of sufficient amplitude and grandeur that the Gods may descend upon it and the Titans stride across it in the struggle that would determine the fate of the worlds. Who, that has read the Balakanda with an intent mind can deny that Valmiki has succeeded in a pre-eminent measure in raising a stage of such proportions?

Side by side with this process we have to disentangle and recognise another, viz., the cunning interplay of the human with the divine element in the texture of the poem. The ethereal strains are subtly modulated by lyrical interludes; the tones of earth mingle with the music of the skies. But in the last final song the epic melts and dissolves into the purely lyrical. This seems to have a profound meaning. Only when Rama had installed himself deepest in the heart of Sita who was the very daughter of the earth and Sita herself had become self of the self of Rama, only then could the incarnation be said to have rounded itself. The birth of Vishnu as the four sons of Dasaratha was but a partial incarnation. Now only is it full-blown and ready to diffuse its fragrance over the entire earth.

तया स राजर्षिसुतोऽभिरामया समेयिवानुत्तम राजकन्यया ।
अतीव रामः शुशुभेऽतिकामया विभुः श्रिया विष्णुरिवामरेश्वरः॥

PART II—NOTES.

1. GENESIS OF THE RAMAYANA

Section I.

(Pages 1 to 6)

1. Sjt. Arbindo Ghosh has the following about the Ramayana :—........................." the Ramayana, the grandest and the most paradoxical poem in the world, which becomes immatchably sublime by disdaining all consistent pursuit of sublimity, supremely artistic by putting aside all the conventional limitations of art, magnificently dramatic by disregarding all dramatic illusion, and uniquely epic by handling the least as well as the most epic material. Not all perhaps can enter at once into the spirit of this master-piece ; but those who have once done so will never admit any poem in the world as its superior."

2. P. 4.—"*Weaver of dainty word-fabrics or fairy thought-patterns.*"—Such art as merely weaves dainty word-fabrics is characterised by the Bhagavata Purana as water which crows delight in, and not the Manasa Lake in which swans sport.

न यद्वचश्चित्रपदं हरेर्यशो जगत्पवित्रं प्रगृणीत कर्हिचित् ।
तद्वायसं तीर्थमुशन्ति मानसा न यत्र हंसा निरमन्त्युशिक्क्षयाः ॥

3. P. 4.—"*Man persists in being as unregenerate as ever*". (भा. 1. 5. 9).—This thought is contained in the following verse in the Bharata, which speaks of the Kulinga bird that would always cry out मा साहसं, 'don't court risks,' and yet would fly into the lion's teeth for any fragment of flesh that may be found sticking in them.

न गाधा गायिनं शास्ति बहु चेदपि गायति ।
प्रकृतिं यान्ति भूतानि कुलिङ्गशकुनिर्यथा ॥

4. Explaining the inner significance of the sister-epic, Mahabharata, Anandavardhana seems to think that art stopping with attracting our mind to the outer phases of life, however varied and interesting, would defeat its own purpose ; to be fruitful it should lift the soul and fix it on the Lord. For he says

तस्मिन्नेव परमेश्वरे भगवति भवत भावितचेतसः
मा भूतविभूतिषु निःसारासु रागिणो गुणेषु वा नयविनयपरा
क्रमादिषु अमीषु केवलेषु केषुचित् सर्वात्मना प्रतिनिविष्टधियः,
तथा चाग्रे पश्यत निःसारतां संसारस्य इत्यमुमेवार्थं द्योतयत्
स्फुटमेवावभासते ॥ Dhvanyaloka, Ch. III.

5. The same Anandavardhana, who was a poet as well as an eminent critic, confesses the poetical and the critical modes of unravelling the beauties and truths of the external world had only ended in weariness of mind ; nor had they given him the satisfaction that devotion to the Lord alone could impart.

या व्यापारवती रसान् रसयितुं काचित्कवीनां नवा
दृष्टिर्या परिनिष्ठितार्थविषयोन्मेषा च वैपश्चिती ।
ते द्वे अप्यवलम्ब्य विश्वमखिलं निर्वर्णयन्तो वयं
श्रान्ता नैव च लब्धमब्धिशयन त्वद्भक्तितुल्यं सुखम् ॥

Dhvanyaloka, Ch. III.

6. P. 6.—"*Worship of suffering almost as an end in itself.*"—Bhavabhuti recognising this truth says in his Uttararamacharita that there is only one *rasa* in the human world, that is, *karuna* or pathos.

एको रसः करुण एव निमित्तभेदाद्भिन्नः पृथक्पृथगिवाश्रयते विवर्तान् । आवर्तबुद्बुदतरङ्गमयान्विकारानम्भो यथा सलिलमेव हि तत्समस्तम् ॥

The idea of the cross forms the very basis of the art of character-drawing in the Ramayana. It reaches its acme in the delineation of the character of Sita who is conceived as the supreme woman of sorrow. Her purity and love shine spotless being bathed in tears. It is her *role* that gives the poem its leading *rasa*, viz., *karuna* according to Anandavardhana.

रामायणे हि करुणो रसः स्वयमादिकविना आसूत्रितः- "शोकः श्लोकत्वमागत" इत्येवं वादिना । निर्व्यूढश्च स एव- सीतात्यन्तवियोगपर्यन्तमेव स्वप्रबन्धमुपरचयता ॥

Dhvanyaloka, Ch. IV.

Section II.

(Pages 6 to 11)

1. *Valmiki* :—Valmiki seems to have been a pen-name. The story of his having been a robber is quite apocryphal and deserves to be rejected. If he had been abandoned by his parents early and had taken to the life of a highwayman when did he acquire all the learning and mastery of language to which the Ramayana bears witness? The name certainly enshrines the fact that he was regarded as a great Yogi who could forget the world for long periods of time. The great Vedanta-Desika interprets the term Valmiki very differently. According to him Valmika is not an ant-hill, but the ear of the earth-deity. And he relied upon a vedic passage in support of his view

"श्रोत्रं ह्येतत् पृथिव्या यद्वल्मीकः"

The term Valmiki would mean one born of the ear of the Earth. Born thus, he has the audition *par-excellence*. He hears all the tones and notes of the earth's experience and is able

to render them into immortal poetry. The ear even more than the eye is according to Vedantadesika the secret of the true poet.

Valmiki, the Adi-Kavi:—The traditional characterisation of Valmiki as 'adikavi' can only be understood as meaning that he was the father of secular poetry. The singers of the Vedic hymns called themselves *Kavayah* and there is a great multiplicity of metres in the Rig Veda. But the hymns were mantras which had been heard and they are supposed to be the original creative knowledge of God himself. Probably upto the time of Valmiki, secular poetry was unknown because the Rishis could not be expected to concern themselves with describing mundane things. Their business was to discover mantras. And the story of the birth of secular poetry in the 'manishada' sloka is certainly very instructive. Poetry, according to the story, is the cry of intense emotion which tends naturally to take on a measured language, moving with a beat and pulse all its own. The mantras are not the utterances of emotion but the result of intuition. Thus Valmiki discovered that human feelings and emotions have a voice of their own and this is secular poetry.

My late lamented friend, Prof. Kuppuswamy Sastriar once told me that Adi-Kavi meant 'Adi-Purushartha-Kavi', that is, poet who sang of the first Purushartha, Dharma. This is no doubt very attractive but does not seem to be the sense in which the term is generally understood.

Section III.

(Pages 11 to 23)

1. *Narada*:—The term itself is interpreted in diverse ways such as नारं द्यति (नारं=अज्ञानं) meaning one who destroys

ignorance ; नरस्य धर्मो नारं तद्ददाति i.e. One who preaches the true nature of man नर एव नारः तं ददाति i.e. One who gives the man. All these derivations are suggested in this first verse but with a special emphasis on the latter two. Narada was a prophet of man *par-excellence.* In the epic, Mahabaratha, which abounds in copious and varied references to him, it is he who put into the mind of Yudbishtira the idea of celebrating the Rajasuya, which is the turning point of the whole story. Other examples of his advent are to be found in almost all the classics, such as, Raghuvamsa, Kumarasambhava, Magha and Naishadha. In the Chandogya Upanishad, Narada is taught the knowledge of the Atman by Sanatkumara. And in consequence he becomes a muni. But in later times Narada is depicted as a bhakta *par-excellence* and even that late work, the Narada Bhakti Sutras is fathered upon him (also a smriti !) At some stage, not content with pure jnana, he should have passed over to bhakti *and humanism.* The point of transition is found in the Narayaneeya portion of the Santi Parva in the Mahabharata. Narada is represented as learning the Narayaneeya religion from Narayana Himself in the Sweta-Dwipa. But as pointed out by the late Mr. Tilak in his Gita-Rahasya, according to this religion, persons do not abandon wordly affairs, but perform them skilfully aud attain the Lord. Action and knowledge are synthesised in this religion and there is also an aspect of worship of the Supreme Person as Lord Narayana. It will be observed that the questions of Valmiki relate to a man who is in the world and takes upon himself the whole burden of work in all its aspects, individual, social and even universal. The Ramayana itself may be regarded as presenting men and women who fulfil this ideal perfectly. Though the Ramayana is regarded as a bhakti and prapatti

sastra, the bhakti envisaged is not that of later times where it has become sublimely passionate and lyric. That aspect seems to have been the special creation of the cult of Krishna worship. And it is Narada himself who comes at the very beginning of the Bhagavata to incite Vyasa to write the Gospel of the New Bhakti also. Narada is represented as one of the ten mind-born sons of Brahma, and the most prominent among divine sages. (देवर्षीणां च नारदः).

2. The predicate used in the opening verse is *paripa-prachcha.* This term has a fixed connotation. It is used only with reference to comprehensive and ultimate questions. Compare Vishnupurana and Gita.

मैत्रेयः परिपप्रच्छ प्रणिपत्योपसृत्य च ।
तद्विद्धि प्रणिपातेन परिप्रश्नेन सेवया ॥

3. The following verses embody Valmiki's questions to Narada:

कोऽन्वस्मिन् सांप्रतं लोके गुणवान् कश्च वीर्यवान् ।
धर्मज्ञश्च कृतज्ञश्च सत्यवाक्यो दृढव्रतः ॥
चारित्रेण च को युक्तः सर्वभूतेषु को हितः ।
विद्वान् कः कः समर्थश्च कश्चैकप्रियदर्शनः ॥
आत्मवान् को जितक्रोधो द्युतिमान् कोऽनसूयकः ।
कस्य बिभ्यति देवाश्च जातरोषस्य संयुगे ॥

It has to be noted that Valmiki in these questions to Narada mentions sixteen characteristics for the perfect man. The number 16 is the symbol of fullness in Sanskrit terminology. The full moon is said to have 16 kalas or digits.

In a sense the whole of the Ramayana may be said to have been anticipated in these questions. It begins with

Gunavan and the Ramayana will tell us later on that Rama's winning qualities in early youth made him the idol of the people. The last question which describes the wrath in battle of the perfect man obviously applies to Rama's fight with Ravana at the close of the epic. The intervening attributes may similarly be applied to each phase of Rama's life *Viryavan* for instance may refer to Rama's bending and breaking the bow of Siva and *Dharmajna* to his renouncing the kingdom and *kritajna* to his relations with Guha. Satyavan and Dridhavrata may similarly remind us of the character of Rama as brought out in his declining to come back at the request of Bharata. And so on. It is not that each phase of life monopolises a single attribute. All the qualities are always there; but each phase of life supplies opportunities for the predominant expression of one particular trait. It has to be noted that there is no express indication in the question of the perfect man as lover or his relationship to and with woman. If that be so, there would be a void or blank in his character. But the blank is there only to a superficial look. The picture as a whole suggests and can be understood only as a pendant to that of a woman more perfect still whose heart he alone can capture. Man and woman form one whole according to the Hindu scriptures. Compare Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.

यथा स्त्रीपुमांसौ संपरिष्वक्तौ स इममेवात्मानं द्वेधाऽपातयत्ततः पतिश्च पत्नी चाभवतां, तस्मादिदमर्धबृगलमिव स्व इति ह स्माह याज्ञवल्क्यस्तस्मादयमाकाशः स्त्रिया पूर्यत एव ।

Also Ramayana: **अनन्या राघवेणाहं भास्करेण प्रभा यथा ।**

According to the Vaishnava religion release is not possible without the grace of the Lord. And this grace is unattainable without the *purushakara* or the mediation *par-excellence*

of the divine spouse, Laxmi, who comes down in the Ramayana as Sita. It would also be of interest to note in this connection that in the north-western recension of the epic we find even in Valmiki's question itself the express mention of Sita :—

"समग्रा रूपिणी लक्ष्मीः कमेकं संश्रिता नरम् "

4. Rama is described as physically perfect by Narada in the following slokas :—

"विपुलांसो महाबाहुः कम्बुग्रीवो महाहनुः ।
महोरस्को महेष्वासः गूढजत्रुररिंदमः ॥
आजानुबाहुः सुशिराः सुललाटः सुविक्रमः ।
समः समविभक्ताङ्गः स्निग्धवर्णः प्रतापवान् ॥
पीनवक्षा विशालाक्षो लक्ष्मीवान् शुभलक्षणः ।

A more detailed description in the technical language of the Samudrika Sastra is given by Hanuman in Sundara Kanda, Sarga, 35. On this, See Agni Purana, Ch. 243, where the purusha-lakshanas given by Samudra to Garga are mentioned in language closely approximating to that in Hanuman's description. The point to be noted here is this. The spirit crystallises itself along its own lines and the purer it is the more wonderful will be the crystal patterns. The perfect spirit will take on a perfect form and we can look through the crystal lines into the soul within.

यदुच्यते पार्वति पापवृत्तये न रूपमित्यव्यभिचारि तद्वचः ।
तथाहि ते शीलमुदारदर्शने तपस्विनामप्युपदेशतां गतम् ॥

The physical beauty of Rama is symbolic of his nature as a Dharmathma or an Ahimsaka as distinguished from Ravana who with his ten heads symbolises Adharma or Himsa. The

following from Agni Purana is very helpful:

भूताऽपीडा ह्यहिंसा स्यात् अहिंसा धर्म उत्तमः ।
यथा गजपदेऽन्यानि पदानि पद्गामिनाम् ॥
एवं सर्वमहिंसायां धर्मार्थमभिधीयते ।
उद्वेगजननं हिंसा सन्तापकरणं तथा ॥
रुक्कृतिः शोणितकृतिः पैशुन्यकरणं तथा ।
हितस्यातिनिषेधश्च मर्मोद्घाटनमेव च ॥
सुखापह्नुतिसंरोधौ वधो, दशविधा च सा ।

(Ch. 372, slokas 4 to 7).

रामो विग्रहवान् धर्मः साधुः सत्यपराक्रमः ॥
रावणो लोक रावणः ॥

Ramayana.

5. Throughout the Ramayana, the words are so woven that they act and react upon each other and produce rare suggestions. This method of sound-weaving is noticeable even in the Samkshepa of Narada. Instances:
The word Sriman occurs in slokas 9 and 13

बुद्धिमान्नीतिमान् वाग्मी श्रीमान् शत्रुनिबर्हणः ॥
प्रजापतिसमः श्रीमान् धाता रिपुनिषूदनः ॥

The basic significance of the term may be the same in either case. But in the respective contexts the word has different values. In sloke 9 it occurs between the words *vagmi* and *satrunibarhanah.* Coming after *vagmi*, it suggests that both Saraswati and Laxmi co-exist in him. Coming before *Satrunibarhanah* it suggests the divine slayer is never so beautiful as when he slays his foes. The collocation in sloka 13 suggests that the sum of perfection of Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra, the Hindu triad, is found, in Rama. The description of Rama in slokas 12 and 13 as

धर्मज्ञः सत्यसन्धश्च प्रजानां च हिते रतः ।
रक्षिता जीवलोकस्य धर्मस्य परिरक्षिता ॥

respectively shows that in his case there was no conflict between duty and delight. The antithesis in sloka 18

विष्णुना सदृशो वीर्ये सोमवत् प्रियदर्शनः ।

between *veerya* and *priyadarsanatva* and in the second line

कालाग्निसदृशः क्रोधे क्षमया पृथिवीसमः ।

between *krodha* and *kshama* shows how the perfect man blends both the feminine and the masculine virtues. The Nietzschean ideal of supermanhood is also satisfied but is transcended.

In slokas 24 and 34 we read about Rama and Bharatha respectively

स जगाम वनं वीरः प्रतिज्ञामनुपालयन् ।
पितुर्वचननिर्देशात् कैकेय्याः प्रियकारणात् ॥
नियुज्यमानो राज्याय नैच्छद्राज्यं महाबलः ।
स जगाम वनं वीरो रामपादप्रसादकः ॥

In the different settings the word *veera* has different values and suggestions. *Veera* comes from the root *aj* to go, to throw away

अज गतिक्षेपणयोः, अजेर्व्यघञपोः (पा. 2. 4. 56.)

In the sense of 'going', *veera* intensifies the meaning of *jagama* in both the passages. In the sense of throwing away it shows that Rama was a *veera* in sacrificing his kingdom and not in taking up arms for it. He did not go merely for the sake of fulfilling his father's truthfulness but to cause happiness to Kaikeyi whose happiness however lay in his misery. Bharata rejected a kingdom, the kingdom that lay at his feet. While Rama obeyed his father's wishes, Bharata

defied the wishes of Vasishta who was the family guru and spiritual father. He also defied his own mother. **Thus** Rama and Bharata are twin heroes in the Ramayana between whom it is not very easy to choose.

जनकस्य कुले जाता देवमायेव निर्मिता । (27)

श्रमणीं धर्मनिपुणां अभिगच्छेति राघवम् ॥ (57)

The likening of Sita to *Devamaya* and the epithet of *Dharmanipuna* applied to Sabari are deeply suggestive as will be afterwards seen when Valmiki develops the part of each in the epic.

The description of the killing of Vali by Rama in sloka 69 is noteworthy. There is no mention of Rama killing Vali taking him unawares. But how did Valmiki evolve such a story out of the description ? The answer is in the use of the word, *nijakhana* in that verse and also the incident dealt with in verses 63 and 64. *Nijakhana* is in the perfect tense called '*lit*' and can be used only when describing an action which nobody has perceived, [परोक्षे लिट्. पा 3. 2. 115.] The Non-perceiver here cannot be the Deva Rishi Narada, the narrator of the action, but the person on whom the action is performed. A strange application of the Sutra no doubt. Thus Vali himself was not aware of Rama aiming an errow at him. That, however, Rama could not be accused of fear or cowardice is brought out in slokas 63 and 64 where he is said to have demonstrated to Sugriva greater prowess than was required to kill Vali.

निजघान च तत्रैनं शरेणैकेन राघवः ॥

6. *The Sanatsujata-Gita on the triad in the characteristics of Narada, in the opening sloka*: (1) *tapas*. The *S. Gita* distinguishes between the two kinds of *tapas*. viz., *kevala* or God-

centred and *sakama*, directed towards the attainment of temporal objects. The *tapas* and the Vedic study in which Narada found delight was of the-former kind. The following slokas from the S. Gita describe the two kinds of *tapas*

निष्कल्मषं तपस्त्वेतत् केवलं परिचक्षते ।
एतत्समृद्धमत्यर्थं तपो भवति नान्यथा ॥
अस्मिँल्लोके तपस्तप्तं फलमन्यत्र भुज्यते ।
ब्राह्मणानां तपः स्वृद्धमन्येषां तावदेव तत् ॥

(सनत्, 2. 12-10.)

In later times the discipline evolved by *tapaswins* was taken over by the *Yogins*. (2) *Vagvit*, a *Vaiyakarana*, grammarian. The S. *Gita* after defining the *muni* has the following text:—

सर्वार्थानां व्याकरणाद्वैयाकरण उच्यते ।
तन्मूलतो व्याकरणं व्याकरोतीति तत्तथा ॥

(सनत्. 2-49.)

Sankara points out that Vaiyakarana is not one who merely knows words. The Supreme is the first *Vaiyakarana* because It expresses the world of name and form and the *muni* likewise becomes a *Vaiyakarana* because of his elucidating Brahman itself as Narada is seen doing here in the *Samkshepa Ramayana*. (3) The ideal of *munitva* or *mouna* is very clearly defined in the second Chapter of the *Sanatsujata Gita*. Since mind and language fail to reach Him, since the very Vedas struggle vainly to cognise Him, therefore, the Paramatma is styled *mouna*.

यतो न वेदा मनसा सहैनमनुप्रविशन्ति ततोऽथ मौनम् ।
यत्रोत्थितो वेदशब्दस्तथायं स तन्मयत्वेन विभाति राजन् ॥

Next coming to human personalities, one becomes *muni* not by merely dwelling in forests but by attaining that silence of

mind and speech which brings him face to face with the *Paramatman.* Such a *muni* is characterised in the same text as directly beholding all the worlds.

मौनाद्धि मुनिर्भवति नारण्यवसनान्मुनिः ।
अक्षरं तं तु यो वेद स मुनिश्रेष्ठ उच्यते ॥
प्रत्यक्षदर्शी लोकानां सर्वदर्शी भवेन्नरः ।
सत्ये वै ब्रह्मणि तिष्ठन् तद्विद्वान्सर्वविद्भवेत् ॥

(सनत्. 2. 48-50.)

Narada also is described in the Ramayana as knowing the three worlds. Thus the appellation *Munipungava* is not bestowed on Narada in any honorific sense but with the full weight of its significance.

The *guru sishya-bhava* (between Valmiki and Narada) which is also envisaged in the opening verse is thus elucidated in the same Gita:

आचार्य योनिमिह ये प्रविश्य भूत्वा गर्भं ब्रह्मचर्यं वदन्ति ।
इहैव ते शास्त्रकारा भवन्ति विहाय देहं परमं यान्ति तत्त्वम् ॥

(सनत्. 3-5.)

The student is said here to be conceived figuratively in the womb of the guru to grow therein and to be delivered when he becomes ripe. This process is the Brahmacharya of the student.

7. Narada's answer to Valmiki's questions covers the entire plot, वस्तुसमग्रं, of the Epic to come, so that the *paramkoutuhalam* of the questioner may fully be satisfied. The word *param koutuhalam* indicates the highest point. It was no mere curiosity that prompted Valmiki but devouring passion. It represents a crisis in his soul—crisis that related to the

translation of the highest Vedic wisdom into human life and action and the achievement of a divine life on earth.

8. Narada's answer, as well as the questions of Valmiki, relates to the inquiry of man and not to the inquiry of *Purusha-jijnasa* and not *dharma-jijnasa*. On this point, Vidyanatha in his *Prataparudriya* points out that the person of hero is what is intended to be known through his qualities. The quest of dharma becomes in effect the quest for a person (*Mahapurusha*). Dharma thus has no independent existence except in a *Mahapurusha* whose nature it is. And commenting upon the first *Sutra* of the *Mimamsa Sastra*, this is what he observes:

अथातो धर्मजिज्ञासेत्युपक्रममाणेन सूत्रकृता महर्षिणापि पुरुषाश्रितगुणस्य धर्मस्य जिज्ञासाद्वारेण महापुरुषगुणवर्णनमेव शास्त्रस्य प्राण इत्युररीकृतम् । तत्तन्न्यायनिरूपणपरस्यापि प्रबन्धराशेर्महापुरुषगुणवर्णनं हेम्नः परं आमोदः ॥

SECTION IV.

(Pages 24 to 31)

1. जगाम तमसा तीरं जाह्नव्यास्त्वविदूरतः ।

The use of '*tu*' in this verse is very significant. The sage was in the habit of taking his daily bath in the sacred Ganges which was not far distant from the Tamasa. But as the poetic mood has come upon him, he is transfixed by the beauties of the waters of the Tamasa which seemed to him just as holy as the Ganges.

2. The killing of the male *krouncha* throws the sage off his balance and he is now as miserable as he was joyous before. The great problem of evil (Adharma) began to burn the inmost recesses of his soul and, to his own surprise

he bursts out in the sloka, *Manishada*, etc. His soul is again caught in a new crisis which is the counter-part of the one characterised as *param-koutuhalam*. (*Vide* Note 7 Section III). He cries out to himself:

पापात्मना कृतं कष्टं वैरग्रहणबुद्धिना ।
यस्तादृशं चारुरवं क्रौञ्चं हन्यादकारणात् ॥

Brahma appears before him, resolves the crisis and sets him on his mission of singing the life of Rama for the good of the world.

श्लोक एव त्वया बद्धः नात्र कार्या विचारणा ।
मच्छन्दादेव ते ब्रह्मन् प्रवृत्तेयं सरस्वती ॥
रामस्य चरितं कृत्स्नं कुरु त्वमृषिसत्तम ।
धर्मात्मनो गुणवतो लोके रामस्य धीमतः ॥

3. मा......अवधी: काममोहितम् The grammatical peculiarity in retaining अडागम in the presence of माङ् against the rule of Panini न माङ्योगे (पा. 6-4-74) seems to have exercised the mind of the commentator who, to overcome the difficulty, would split the words त्वम् अगमः as तु. अम. गम. But Bhavabhuti has given the right solution in the Uttara Rama-charita where he says speaking of this verse

चित्रम् आम्नायादन्यो नूतनश्छन्दसामवतारः (उ. 2. 13.)

The sloka is a new transformation of the Vedic Chandas where such usage is permissible according to Panini.

बहुलं छन्दस्यमाङ्योगेऽपि. (पा. 6. 4. 75.)

4. Even as white light is dispersed into the seven primary colours, the divine *ananda* descending into the world is refracted into the nine *rasas* (basic poetic modes) of Hindu poetics. They are respectively *santa*, *sringara*, *roudra* and *bhayanaka*, *bibhatsa* *karuna*, *adbhuta*, *hasya* and *veera*.

Valmiki, the future poet of the Ramayana, passes through the whole gamut or nexus of emotional experience, as can be seen in this sarga. In the waters of the Tamasa, he sees the image of peace, *santa*:

अकर्दममिदं तीर्थं भरद्वाज निशामय ।
रमणीयं प्रसन्नाम्बु सन्मनुष्यमनो यथा ॥

In the sport of the birds the influence of love or *sringara*:

तस्याभ्याशे तु मिथुनं चरन्तमनपायिनम्
ददर्श भगवांस्तत्र क्रौञ्चयोश्चारुनिस्वनम् ।

Roudra and *bhayanaka* follow when the hunter discharges the arrow and kills the male bird.

तस्मात्तु मिथुनादेकं पुमांसं पापनिश्चयः ।
जघान वैरनिलयो निषादस्तस्य पश्यतः ॥
तं शोणितपरीताङ्गं वेष्टमानं महीतले
भार्या तु निहतं दृष्ट्वा रुराव करुणां गिरम् ॥

He experiences *bibhatsa* when he witnesses the striken bird rolling on the ground in a welter of blood.

He next gives way to *karuna* or pathos on hearing the piercing cries of the female bird.

ततः करुणवेदित्वादधर्मोऽयमिति द्विजः ।
निशाम्य रुदतीं क्रौञ्चीं इदं वचनमब्रवीद् ॥

His soka transforms itself into a sloka and he bursts out with the words cursing the hunter and he now experiences wonder or *adbhuta* at the new mode of speech

तस्यैवं ब्रुवतश्चिन्ता बभूव हृदि वीक्षतः ।
शोकार्तेनास्य शकुनेः किमिदं व्याहृतं मया ॥

When Brahma smiled at his tribulation, there is the note of *hasya*.

तमुवाच ततो ब्रह्मा प्रहस्य मुनिपुङ्गवम् ।

Valmiki finally evolved into a great spiritual knight (*Veera*) and composed Ramayana in a flaming ardour of *Dharma*.

In the opening verses of sarga 3, the word Dharma seems to have a metaphysical and psychological significance rather than an ethical one. Valmiki is said to have beheld the whole career of Rama by *Dharma* and *Dharma Virya*. He saw what was known and unknown, what was past and what was future like a myrobalam fruit on his hand.

(पुरा यत्तत्र निर्वृत्तं पाणावामलकं यथा.)

Dharma has given him the inner eye and the passage itself says that Valmiki was in yoga. The *Yogasutra* 29, Chapter 3 runs as follows :—

(प्रसंख्यानेऽप्यकुसीदस्य सर्वथा विवेकख्यातेर्धर्ममेघः समाधिः)
(धर्मं मेहति सिञ्चतीति धर्ममेघः)   (योगसूत्र. पा. 4. 29.)

Here we come across a term *Dharmamegha* as the name of a particular form of *samadhi*. "Unto him that has attained it comes a peculiar knowledge and a peculiar light. The great prophets of the world had had this and had found the whole foundation of knowledge within themselves." (Swami Vivekananda's translation of the *yoga-sutras*). It seems to us that *Dharma* in *Dharma-virya* should also be interpreted similarly. Valmiki had attained that height of the soul by which he was able to behold not merely the external forms of the various characters of the epic but also the forces and motives that drove them, as also the place of each in the world-play. Govindaraja interprets *Dharma-virya* as meaning the grace of Brahma which Valmiki had already received. He interprets Yoga in the sense of means, or aid. We are unable to follow the learned commentator. The grace of Brahma may no doubt have been the final cause of

Valmiki's new vision. But we are concerned with the efficient cause connoted by the term *Dharma-virya*.

तत्सर्वं धर्मवीर्येण यथावत्संप्रपश्यति ॥
तत्सर्वं तत्त्वतो दृष्ट्वा धर्मेण स महाद्युतिः ॥
ततः पश्यति धर्मात्मा तत्सर्वं योगमास्थितः ॥

2. *Vastu* (plot) *Neta* (Hero) and *rasa* (sentiment) are said to be the three root principles in a poem or a drama. In the Ramayana, Narada gives the plot and Valmiki had conceived the characteristics of the ideal hero by virtue of his *tapas*. As for the rasas, they present themselves one after the other, in the course of the Krouncha incident and its sequel. But there is a fourth principle which is equally important, purushartha, or the delineation of Dharma, artha, kama, and moksha. As in the case of the rasas, only one of these is to be taken as the leading purushartha. Bhamaha, in his definition of a *Mahakavya* would seem to prefer Artha. He is considered as the father of Alankarikas and he is a redoubtable champion of the realistic school of poetry. (*Vide* his criticisms on *Sandesa Kavyas*, and the episode of the illusory elephant in the story of Vatsa). The sublimity of the Ramayana, however, consists in making *dharma* the leading purushartha of the epic ; *kama* and *artha* are to realise their glory, as handmaids to *dharma* and not as its enemies.

कामार्थगुणसंयुक्तं धर्मार्थगुणविस्तरम् ।
समुद्रमिव रत्नाढ्यं सर्वश्रुतिमनोहरम् ॥

Thus the conduct of Rama as man, as son, as brother, as husband, as friend, as student, as knight, as saviour and protector and as king is considered by the Hindus as setting the very norm of the dharmas appropriate to each of the roles. रामो विग्रहवान् धर्मः is what is said of him in the poem itself.

Valmiki in the course of the epic deals with *dharma* in all its aspects, special as well as universal.

रक्षिता जीवलोकस्य धर्मस्य परिरक्षिता ।
रक्षिता स्वस्य धर्मस्य स्वजनस्य च रक्षिता ॥

is what is said of the hero Rama. *Dharma* is the poet's characteristic term for religion, and the social virtues and it is also the equivalent of *tapas* and other spiritual pratices. On this point the following sloka from the *Vayupurana* will be of interest:

धारणा धृतिरित्यर्थाद्धातोर्धर्मः प्रकीर्तितः ।
अधारणेऽमहत्वे च अधर्म इति चोच्यते ॥

Having composed the *Ramayana* the poet seems to excuse himself for the title he has given to the poem. He does not know which is greater, the life of Rama or the glory of Sita or the slaying of Ravana. And therefore he gives in the following sloka three titles to the peom and the reader may choose that which he likes best.

काव्यं रामायणं कृत्स्नं सीतायाश्चरितं महत् ।
पौलस्त्यवधमित्येवं चकार चरितव्रतः ॥

But Valmiki would seem to regret that he had not called it *Sitayanam* for he reserves the epithet *Mahat* only for her life. It is as if Rama finds a place only in the life of Sita who is the real destroyer of Ravana and Ravanahood.

सर्वथा सर्वभूतानां नास्ति मृत्युरलक्षणः ।
तव तावदयं मृत्युर्मैथिलीकृतलक्षणः ॥
सीता निमित्तजो मृत्युस्त्वया दूरादुपाहृतः ।

The introduction of Kusa and Lava as the first singers of the *Ramayana* before Rama himself is a master-stroke. Later on it forms part of the story of Rama itself since Rama

was to recognise his sons only at the conclusion of the recitation. A saint who composes a song in praise of his deity sings it before the deity and his greatest satisfaction is derived from the fact that it has been offered to the Lord. Similarly, having composed the *Ramayana* Valmiki secretly yearned that Rama himself should hear it because it was his (Valmiki's) greatest offering at his (Rama's) feet. But how does Rama receive it? In vanity or exultation? No. He receives it with the impersonal ear. He was seated on his golden throne amidst his brothers and ministers when the singing began. But as it proceeded, the poem says, Rama by degrees came down and became one among the ordinary listeners. Thus he forgot that he was himself the hero of the poem, but listened as if to the story of a hero whom he knew not but wished to emulate. This is brought out by the word *bubhooshaya* in the concluding sloka.

ततस्तु तौ रामवचःप्रचोदितावगायतां मागविधानसंपदा ।
स चापि राम: परिषद्गतः शनैर्बुभूषया सक्तमना बभूव ह ॥

Concluding Note.

Like the greatest things in Hindu thought and literature the *Ramayana* also came to society from the forest. Vyasa is said to have composed the Mahabharata in his *asrama* on the Himalayas. The forest recluses were divided into two orders, the married and the unmarried. Both had once been members of society and had lived in the city or village. The forest recluse, from the beginning was able to preserve a balance between thought and activity, life and solitude. There was also in his life that element of communion with nature in all her modes which kept him perpetually near the very foundations and the cosmos. There was a breadth in his life which was lacking to the mere cave-spirituality which

had more of depth. Thus a forest recluse while being near to nature also heard the voices of life but shorn of distorting personal intimacy. He was thus peculiarly fitted to synthesise solitude and silence with life and action. We can recall here the following verse of Murari where he finely points out how the daily round of the forest *Muni* was calculated to illumine the deeper vision and awaken the sublime voices :

वारांस्त्रीनभिषुण्वते विदधते वन्यैः शरीरस्थिती-
रैणेय्यां त्वचि संविशन्ति वसते चापि त्वचस्तारवीः ।
तत्पश्यन्ति च धाम नाभिपततो यच्चार्मणे चक्षुषी
धन्यानां विरजस्तमा भगवती चर्येयमाह्लादते ॥

We can also recall here that Rabindranath Tagore was never tired of emphasising the part the forest has played in the evolution of the Indian culture.

2. The theme of divine incarnation.

Note No. 1: *The doctrine of Nara-Narayana.*

The underlying principle of the *Nara-Narayana* doctrine finds an inspiring interpretation in both our great epics. It is implicit in the Ramayana in the pairing of Rama and Lakshmana and Bharata and Satrughna.

समानेऽपि हि सौभ्रात्रे यथोभौ रामलक्ष्मणौ ।
तथा भरतशत्रुघ्नौ प्रीत्या द्वन्द्वं बभूवतुः ॥

Ragh. Sar. 10.

It is explicitly stated in the Mahabharata in many places. The doctrine is referred to in the opening invocatory verse itself.

नारायणं नमस्कृत्य नरं चैव नरोत्तमम् ।
देवीं सरस्वतीं व्यासं ततो जयमुदीरयेत् ॥

भार. आदि. 1-1.

Narayana who is Sri Krishna in the Mahabharata is always found in juxtaposition to Nara who is Arjuna. One is the *Yogeswara*, the other is *Dhanurdhara* as Sanjaya puts it.

यत्र योगेश्वरः कृष्णः यत्र पार्थो धनुर्धरः ।

तत्र श्रीर्विजयो भूतिः ध्रुवा नीतिर्मतिर्मम ॥

Gita. Adh. 18–78.

This means the static and the dynamic are in perpetual flux, each struggling to manifest itself through the other. It is thus a two-way passage. We may add in passing that the juxtaposition of Nara and Narayana in the first half of the verse नारायणं नमस्कृत्यनरंचैव is balanced by that of Vyasa and Sarasvati in the latter half. The temporal expression of Narayana being Nara, we are justified in inferring that the literary expression of Sarasvati is Vyasa. Compare in the Ramayana the remark of Brahma made to Valmiki:

मच्छन्दादेव ते ब्रह्मन् प्रवृत्तेयं सरस्वती ।

Note No. 2: *The Doctrine of Divine incarnation*:

Here are the well-known verses of the Gita that relate to the doctrine of divine incarnation:

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।

अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥

Gita. Adh. 4–7.

परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।

धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवामि युगे युगे ॥

Gita. Adh. 4–8.

अजोऽपि सन्नव्ययात्मा भूतानामीश्वरोऽपि सन् ।

प्रकृतिं स्वामवष्टभ्य सम्भवाम्यात्ममायया ॥

Gita. Adh. 4–6.

The maintenance of Dharma is in the interest of cosmic equilibrium. It is given a personal turn, precisely to embody the categorical imperatives in a picturesque manner. The universe is not a mechanical system but a dynamic being, which imposes on each of us the need for self-adjustment and harmony. In maintaining it, we maintain ourselves. Adharma manifests itself every time this equipoise is disturbed either through ignorance or wantonness. This leads to a crisis which calls forth the advent of the *Avatar.* Though the *Avatara* is the supreme expression of the Brahman which is *Aja*—unborn—*Avyayatma* — unchangeable — and *Bhutanam Isvara*—the Lord of creation,—yet it has to be embodied in time, place and context. The chief limitation it imposes on itself is self-forgetfulness; only with this can it enter into complete personal relation with the prakriti-ridden afflicted souls. Compare Rama declaring to Brahma:

आत्मानं मानुषं मन्ये रामं दशरथात्मजम् ।

and Kalidasa:

उन्मनाः प्रथमजन्मचेष्टितान्यस्मरन्नपि बभूव राघवः ।

Also *Sri Bhagavata*:

स्मरतां हृदि विन्यस्य विद्धं दण्डककण्टकैः ।
स्वपादपल्लवं रामः आत्मज्योतिरगात्पुनः ॥

Sk. 9-11, 19.

3. The Balakanda.

Note No. 1:

सर्वापूर्वमियं येषां आसीत्कृत्स्ना वसुंधरा ।
प्रजापतिमुपादाय नृपाणां जयशालिनाम् ॥
येषां स सगरो नाम सागरो येन खानितः ।
षष्टिः पुत्रसहस्राणि यं यान्तं पर्यवारयन् ॥

B 5-1, 2.

These are the opening lines of the Ramayana sung by Kusa and Lava. The references to Vasundhara, Sagara and even to the number 60,000 are most suggestive. The heroine of the Ramayana is to be the daughter of Vasundhara. Sagara has to play a part as a character both when Hanuman crossed him and Rama built a dam over him ; and the number 60,000 corresponding to the age of Dasaratha, is suggestive of Rama's illustrious father. These three expressions together satisfy the rule of poetics : मनाक् काव्यार्थसूचनम् *i.e.* the fore-shadowing of the events of the story in the opening lines. The picture presented by the first verse has reference to the golden age, in which men so fondly believe in all climes and ages. The story of Sagara and his sons is an example of filial duty, in the performance of which the 60,000 sons of Sagara were reduced to ashes. Their restoration to heaven later on is, in no small measure, due to the noble cause for which they sacrificed themselves. What the Ramayana sings is the glory of the self-same filial duty and the sacrifice it entails.

Note No, 2 :

The word "Yantam" in the verse does not mean mere 'going' but is a technical word of the *Artha Sastra* meaning 'going on a military expendition'—'Yana'. The speciality of Sagara was that his huge army was composed of his own children.

Note No. 3 :

महदुत्पन्नमाख्यानं रामायणमितिश्रुतम् ।
तदिदं वर्तयिष्यावः सर्वं निखिलमादितः ॥
धर्मकामार्थसहितं श्रोतव्यमनसूयया ॥

B. 5 : 3, 4.

The significance of these lines is this. From Manu downwards, every king was contributing a chapter to an

epic of which the completion and culmination was the Ramayana which sang of the exploits of the supreme hero Rama, who represented the sum-total of all the virtues of the Ikshvaku race.

Note No. 4:

Dharma-Kama-Artha Sahitam.—This means that the excellence of the Ramayana consists in the exposition of the *Sahitya* or harmonious existence together of the trinity viz. *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kama*, as seen in the conduct of Rama and his brothers. That this is a rare thing will be understood from the following verse of Manu, which mentions four rival schools of thought regarding it.

धर्मार्थावुच्यते श्रेयः कामार्थौ धर्म एव वा ।
अर्थ एवेह वा श्रेयः त्रिवर्ग इति तु स्थितिः ॥

Dharma, *Artha* and *Kama* are together known as *Trivarga*. Neither Manu, in this verse nor Valmiki in the Ramayana explicitly mentions the fourth *varga* or *purushartha* viz., *moksha*. But in the Ramayana it is mentioned in an indirect and implied manner such as

जगाम पुण्यां गतिं आत्मनः शुभाम् ।

in the episode of Jatayu.

Note No. 5:

तस्य भार्यासु तिसृषु ह्री-श्री कीर्त्युपमासु च ।
विष्णो पुत्रत्वमागच्छ कृत्वात्मानं चतुर्विधम् ॥

B : 15—19, 20.

This is the prayer addressed by the gods to Sriman Narayana whom they wanted to descend on earth in four human forms. Kausalya, Sumitra and Kaikeyi unto whom he was to be born as sons are compared here to *Hri*, *Sri* and *Kirti* respectively.

These are the three famous daughters of Daksha, and, as their names imply, embody the three vital norms of shame, service and fame respectively. The object of the Devas in referring to them is not merely for a literary purpose, viz, *Upama Alankara*, but has a far-reaching significance. *Hri*. *Sri* and *Kirti* were just the norms which Ravana in his *Rakshasic* career had completely vulgarised. This vulgarisation betokened the doom of cosmic well-being and brought forth a crisis which an *Avatar* alone could avert. In his regime *Hri* became disfigured as *Mana* or prestige ; *Sri* as *Bhoga* or self-enjoyment and *Kirti* as *Para-Paribhava* or forced subjugation of others. Kautilya, when he said मानाद्रावणः परदारानप्रयच्छन्, really meant the disfigurement of the *Hri* norm by Ravana. The business of the divine incarnation in the Ramayana was, first of all, to redeem these norms and bring happiness unto the hearts of the Daksha daughters who were their presiding deities, and then only to destroy Ravana, their seducer. *Hri* was redeemed and exalted by Rama when, from a true sense of shame at disobeying his father and displeasing his step-mother, he preferred to go to the forest renouncing the kingdom in favour of Bharata. *Sri* (derived from the root श्रीङ्सेवायाम्) was restored to her throne when Lakshmana considering that service to Rama alone constituted his entire wealth went after him and devoted body and soul to his Kainkarya. Bharata, far from seeking any benefit from the machinations of his mother, turned them by a stroke of self-conquest into a first-class opportunity to acquire ever-lasting fame—fame under whose radiance even the wickedness of his mother was not only forgiven but applauded as god-inspired. (Cp. the remarks of Guha and Bharadwaja)

Guha :

धन्यस्त्वं न त्वया तुल्यं पश्यामि जगतीतले ।
अयत्नादागतं राज्यं यस्त्वं त्यक्तुमिहेच्छसि ॥
शाश्वती खलु ते कीर्तिर्लोकाननुचरिष्यति ।
यस्त्वं कृच्छ्रगतं रामं प्रत्यानयितुमिच्छसि ॥

Ayo. 85 : 12, 13

Bharadwaja :

त्वय्येतत्पुरुषव्याघ्र युक्तं राघववंशजे ।
गुरुवृत्तिर्दमश्चैव साधूनां चानुयायिता ॥

Ayo. 91 : 20.

न दोषेणावगन्तव्या कैकेयी भरत त्वया ।
रामप्रव्राजनं ह्येतत्सुखोदर्कं भविष्यति ॥
देवानां दानवानां च ऋषीणां भावितात्मनाम् ।
हितमेव भविष्यद्धि राम प्रव्राजनादिह ॥

Ayo. 92 : 30, 31.

Satrugna followed in the foot-steps of his twin brother Lakshmana and devoted his life to the service of Bharata, further strengthening the true interpretation of 'Sri'.

Note No. 6 : *The Payasa-bearer* :

The Being with a golden bowl of *Payasa* in his hand, which arose from the sacrificial fire at the time of the full offering of ghee or *Poornahuti* by Rishyasringa, is thus described : प्रादुर्भूतं महद् भूतं महावीर्यं महाबलम् । etc. Kalidasa puts to himself the question why such a huge and mighty Bhuta to carry but a vessel-full of *Payasa* and answers : अनुप्रवेशादाद्यस्य पुंसः तेनापि दुर्वहम् । His poetic commentary on Valmiki, not only here but in a number of other contexts is most illuminating.

Note No. 7: ***Rishyasringa's Brahmacharya*** **:**

द्वैविध्यं ब्रह्मचर्यस्य भविष्यति महात्मनः ।
लोकेषु प्रथितं राजन् द्विजैश्च कथितं सदा ॥

B. 9 : 5, 6.

Without asserting the superiority of one over the other, it is possible to distinguish two concepts of Brahmacharya in our classics. There is the Brahmacharya which altogether ignores or is ignorant of sex ; and there is the other Brahmacharya which finds its culmination in uniting itself without conflict with feminine beauty. The latter is thus beautifully described by Kalidasa in :

कान्ता संमिश्रदेहोऽप्यविषयमनसां यः परस्ताद्यतीनाम् ।

This is so rare that the story of Rishyasringa is a unique manifestation of it (*vide* also *Mahabharatha Vana Parva Adh.* 111 to 114). No less than a super-tapasvin in whom the highest harmony is effected is necessary as the means of ushering in the Avatara. Compare :—

संप्रत्यमी ये पुनः जातास्ते ध्रुवमृष्यश्रृङ्गतपसामैश्वर्यमिक्ष्वाकवः ॥

(Anargharaghava)

Note No. 8; ***Halahala Visha*** **:**

देवतानां भयं दृष्ट्वा श्रुत्वा वाक्यं च शार्ङ्गिणः ।
हालाहलं विषं घोरं सञ्जग्राहामृतोपमम् ॥

B. 45 : *sloka* 25 (Kumbakonam Edn.)

When the gods churned the ocean in the hope of getting Amrita, they were rewarded with the appearance, at first, of the most dreaded poison *Halahala.* They recoiled in dismay from it as none of them was prepared to receive it, much less

master it. The pursuit of any benefit in *Samsara* is inseparable from its opposite; and life and death, nectar and po son always form an intimate and inseparable pair. So Siva had to come and take the poison in his throat.

Siva as Rudra, represents the principle of destruction, *Halahala* being one of the accessories of the same principle. The destructive power of the poison loses its potency when merged in its primal source. [स्वासु योनिषु शाम्यति.]

Note No. 9: ***Uma's Wedding with Siva*:**

उग्रेण तपसा युक्तां ददौ शैलवरः सुताम् ।
रुद्रायाप्रतिरूपाय उमां लोकनमस्कृताम् ॥

B. 35–20.

Uma sought her lover in the world's Lord by undergoing a severe course of penance, and Kama who presumed to effect their union was burnt to ashes. Uma-Siva wedding symbolises the union of the ascetic in us with Prakriti which consciously trains itself for sacrifice. The issue of such a union is Kumara, the killer of evil spirits. [कुत्सितान् मारयति]. He became the general of the divine hosts.

Kalidasa's treatment of the divine nuptials in the Kumarasambhava is one of the most amazing pieces of poetry. It is an epithalamium entirely on the spiritual plane.

Note No. 10: ***The Story of Ganga-Avatarana*:**

तच्छङ्करशिरोभ्रष्टं भ्रष्टं भूमितले पुनः ।
व्यरोचत तदा तोयं निर्मलं गतकल्मषम् ॥

B. 43–27.

Before she actually decended to the underworld and effected the wonderful transformation of the ashes of Sagara's sons into divine beings she had two obstructions in her path.

First she was caught in the matted locks of Siva, the supreme ascetic. This obstruction only tended to increase the momentum of her purifying flow. She then had to undergo a rebirth, as it were, as *Jahnavi*. It was then that her powers of purification attained their final consummation.

Like Vishnu from whose feet she is said to have sprung, Ganga too had to *descend* and undergo all the tribulations of life in order to redeem fallen souls.

Compare Ballata's description of the role of a Purushothama by which name Vishnu is meant.

पुंस्त्वादपि प्रविचलेद्‌थ यद्यधोऽपि-
यायाद्‌थ प्रणयने न महानपि स्यात् ।
अभ्युद्धरेत्तदपि विश्वमितीदृशीयं-
केनापि दिक् प्रकटिता पुरुषोत्तमेन ॥

Note No. 11: *Tataka Vadha* :

This episode is one of the cruxes in the Ramayana, mentioned by Bhavabhuthi along with the stepping back of Rama in his duel with Khara and the method adopted by him in destroying Vali.

वृद्धास्ते न विचारणीयचरितास्तिष्ठन्तु हुं वर्ण्यते-
सुन्दस्त्रीदमनेऽप्यखण्डयशसो लोके महान्तो हि ते ।
यद् द्वित्राण्यपराङ्मुखानि च पदान्यासन् खरायोधने
यद्वा कौशलमिन्द्रसूनुनिधने तत्राप्यभिज्ञो जनः ॥

Uttararama charita.

The chief point to be borne in mind here, is, that Rama is called upon to practise not a rule (उत्सर्ग) but an exception (अपवाद). An exception conceived in the proper spirit and well executed would override a general rule, however binding or important. अपवाद इवोत्सर्गं व्यावर्तयितुं ईश्वरः । (*vide* Raghu-

vamsa and Kumarasambhava). But the permission to practise the exception is available only to those that have effected the conquest of the tendency to use it to a selfish or expedient end. *Tataka Vadha* by Rama and Indrajit's killing of *Maya-Sita* are contrasted examples. Rama satisfies the code of knighthood as he justifies his action on the following grounds :

सोऽहं पितुर्वचः श्रुत्वा शासनाद्ब्रह्मवादिनः ।
करिष्यामि न सन्देहः ताटकावधमुत्तमम् ॥
गोब्राह्मणहितार्थाय देशस्यास्य सुखाय च ।
तव चैवाप्रमेयस्य वचनं कर्तुमुद्यतः ॥

B. 26. 4, 5.

But Indrajit justifies his proposed deed by quoting the requirements of victory, the need to break the morale of the enemy, to cause him all such discomfort and confusion as to force him to give up the fight.

न हन्तव्याः स्त्रियश्चेति यद् ब्रवीषि प्लवंगम ।
पीडाकरममित्राणां यत्स्यात् कर्तव्यमेव तत् ॥

Yudh. 81 ; 29, 30.

Such is the ethics of 'total war' as we have now come to describe the phenomenon with our genius for euphemism. So, even the killing of a woman is justified by Indrajit. In due course, he finds an apt pupil in Satyaki in the Maha-Bharata, who invokes his authority as that of Valmiki himself for his killing of Bhurisravas after the latter had been deprived of his right arm by Arjuna, perhaps the most shameful act of cowardly security in all our literature. Satyaki :

अपि चायं पुरा गीतः श्लोको वाल्मीकिना भुवि ।
न हन्तव्याः स्त्रिय इति यद् ब्रवीषि प्लवंगम ॥

* सर्वकालं मनुष्येण व्यवसायवता सदा ।
पोडाकरममित्राणां यत्स्यात् कर्तव्यमेव तत् ॥
अनुष्ठितं मया तच्च कस्मात् गर्हथ मूढवत् ॥

Bharata Drona. Adhyaya 143, Sl. 84-86.

(*N.*B.*—We are indebted to Satyaki and Mahabharata for for this half verse which is not to be found in the Ramayana). It proved how the devil can quote scripture in support of himself. On the other hand, Kalidasa expounds the need for destroying Tataka in the interest of that respect for womanhood and that chivalrous instinct she had so effectively destroyed by her appearance and behaviour.

उद्यतैकभुजयष्टिमायतीं श्रोणिलम्बिपुरुषान्त्रमेखलाम् ।
तां विलोक्य वनितावधे घृणां पत्रिणा सह मुमोच राघवः ॥

To kill Tataka becomes an act of service in the very interests of the sex which she so badly misrepresented.

It is significant that Rama is represented as winning his spurs with the killing of Tataka. It equips him at long range for the destruction of Ravana himself. Our ancients realised how complex life is for the finer-grained souls among us, and how it is for their benefit alone that the exceptions are devised. Their benefit is ultimately the benefit of the world.

Note No. 12: ***Ahalya:***

For the elucidation of the meaning of Ahalya see Ramayana Uttarakanda Sarga 30, Verses 24, 25.

सोऽहं तासां विशेषार्थं स्त्रियमेकां विनिर्ममे ।
यद्यत्प्रजानां प्रत्यङ्गं विशिष्टं तत्तदुद्धृतम् ॥
ततो मया रूपगुणैरहल्या स्त्री विनिर्मिता ।

हलं नामेह वैरूप्यं हल्यं तत्प्रभव भवेत् ॥
यस्मान्न विद्यते हल्यं तेनाहल्येति विश्रुता ॥

But *vide* the remarks of Kumarillabhatta against this Interpretation of Ahalya which has led to the story of her misconduct with Indra

प्रजापतिस्तावत् प्रजापालनाधिकारादादित्य एवोच्यते। स चारुणोदयवेलायामुषसमुद्यन्नभ्येति । सा तदागमनादेवोपजायत इति तद्दुहितृत्वेन व्यपदिश्यते । तस्यां च अरुणकिरणाख्यबीजनिक्षेपात् स्त्रीपुरुषसंयोगवदुपचारः । एवं समस्ततेजाः परमेश्वरत्वनिमित्तेन्द्रशब्दवाच्यः सवितैव अहनि लीयमानतया रात्रेरहल्याशब्दवाच्यायाः क्षयात्मकजरणहेतुत्वाज्जीर्यत्यस्मादनेन चोदितेन वेत्यहल्याजार इत्युच्यते, न परस्त्रीव्यभिचारात् ।

Ahalya, according to Kumarila means Night and Indra signifies the Sun. Jara or Jarana means 'making one disappear'. The whole legend of Indra seducing Ahalya is based on what is called the Aitihasika interpretation of the Vedic passage in the Arunaprasna गौरावस्कन्दिन् अहल्यायैजार ।

The presiding deity of *Dharma* becoming alarmed at Indra setting such a bad example as violating the purity of a Rishi-patni is said to have shown herself in the form of a Chandali cooking her food in a crematorium, as a last minute attempt to prevent him from his contemplated perpetration of the deed. The following Slokas relate to the dialogue between the Chandali and Indra as I have heard them from my revered father:

इन्द्रः पृच्छति चण्डालीं किमिदं पच्यतेऽशुभे ।
श्वमांसं सुरया सिक्तं कपालेन चिताग्निना ॥
पुनः पृच्छति चण्डालीं चर्मणापिहितं त्वया ।

The next line is to the effect, that she did so lest any sinner that harbours the thought of defiling the क्षेत्र of a Rishi should pollute it by his sight.

Ahalya, according to tradition, was transformed into an image of stone by Gautama's curse. Compare Kalidasa

सा हि गौतमवधूः शिलामयी ।

And a poet has thus described the process of her coming back to her human form at the sight of Sri Rama.

शिलाकल्पं धत्ते शिवशिव वियुङ्क्ते कठिनतां
अहो ! नारीच्छायां वहति वनितारूपमयते ।
वदत्येवं रामे प्रहसितमुखो वल्कलभुरः-
स्थले धृत्वा बध्वा कचभरमुदस्थादृषिवधूः ॥

But in the Ramayana we find only the following description regarding the curse :

इह वर्षसहस्राणि बहूनि त्वं निवत्स्यसि ।
वायुभक्षा निराहारा तप्यन्ती भस्मशायिनी ॥
अदृश्या सर्वभूतानां आश्रमेऽस्मिन्निवत्स्यसि ।

B : 48, 29, 30.

This *sounds* like a curse, but is really the ordering of a severe course of discipline to Ahalya to wash out her sin. But this discipline of *Nirahara* or the starvation of the senses cannot by itself complete her purification. It had to be supplemented by the *Darsana* of the *Para* in the divine form of Sri Rama.

विषया विनिवर्तन्ते निराहारस्य देहिनः ।
रसवर्जं रसोऽप्यस्य परं दृष्ट्वा निवर्तते ॥

(Gita Chap. 2. Sl. 59).

Hence Gautama adds :

यदा चैतद्वनं घोरं रामो दशरथात्मजः ।
आगमिष्यति दुर्धर्षः तदा पूता भविष्यसि ॥

Note No. 13 : *Viswamitra's Tapas and its Significance.*

The *tapas* of Viswamitra is a demonstration as it were of the essential elements in the process of attaining to *Brahmarishitva*.

Brahmarishitva is conceived as purified *Maitra* and *Karuna* i. e. friendliness and sympathy, on a cosmic scale. c f. *Maha Bharata Vana Parva*, 209, 37,

यस्य चात्मसमो लोकः धर्मज्ञस्य मनस्विनः ।
सर्वधर्मेषु चरतः तं देवाः ब्राह्मणं विदुः ॥

These distinctive qualities are however, prone to get mixed with *Kama* (sensuousness) and *Krodha* (anger). *Tapas* is a progressive distillation in which the finer essences of *Maitra* and *Karuna* are separated from the dross of *Kama* and *Krodha*. In the course of his *Tapas* Viswamitra is caught up in the meshes of the dross and ultimately transcends their reach.

Let us take the Menaka episode first. On her appearance, Viswamitra welcomed her in the style of greeting a friendly spirit.

अप्सरः स्वागतं तेऽस्तु वस चेह ममाश्रमे ।

B : 63-69.

It is the *Maitra* element that is dominent. However, he appears to delude himself by the notion that the *Maitra* element would not manifest itself to its fullest extent unless it leads to *Kama*

मनोजातिरनाधीना सुखेष्वेव प्रवर्तते ।
स्नेहस्य ललितो मार्गः काम इत्यभिधीयते ॥

After the event he realises that this is an unnecessary overstep and that unusual care should be exercised to prevent the subtle permeation of *Kama* into the region of *Maitra*. (For an example of pure *Maitra* unadulterated by *Kama*, see the Narayana-Urvasi episode. Devi Bhag. Sk. 4, Adh 6).

Let us next take the *Trisanku* and *Sunassepa* episodes, It is Karuna that prompts interference by Viswamitra. But even here his Karuna oversteps its bounds of purity and is vitiated by *Krodha* when it becomes frustrated. Cursing of Vasishta's sons and his own is the outcome. Here also, Viswamitra realises after the event the need for complete separation of the finer *Karuna* from the dross of *Krodha* which is found in almost inseparable alliance with it.

The Rambha episode represents a forward step in the progressive distillation. Though even here there was a curse, it had been voluntarily coupled with the mode of redemption through one who had obtained prefection in Brahmana qualities,

ब्राह्मणः सुमहातेजाः तपोबलसमन्वितः ।
उद्धरिष्यति रम्भे त्वां मत्कोपकलुषीकृताम् ॥

B : 64, 13

It is in the Indra episode that we find the distillation complete. The result is that without any sign of untoward word or feeling Viswamitra surrenders his morsel of food to Indra, in the disguise of a Brahmin.

न किंचिदवदत् विप्रं मौनव्रतमथास्थितः ॥

R. 1–65–7.

Once the gross elements had been completely kept down and the pure *Maitra* and *Karuna* alone had become active in him he becomes a true *Brahmarishi* or *Viswamitra*. It is at

this stage that Brahma and Vashista appear and confirm him in this status.

That this is a unique status is evident from the fact that the grammarian Panini constructued a special *sutr* मित्रेचर्षौ ॥ about Viswamitra. According to it, only as applied to a *Rishi*, the word means 'A Friend of the Cosmos,' but as applied to others, it would mean just the opposite !

For a description of the process of attaining to Brahminhood through *Tapas* by Viswamitra. See Murari :

यः क्षत्रदेहं परितक्ष्य टङ्कैस्तपोमयैः ब्राह्मणमुच्चकार ।
परोरजोभिः स्वगुणैरगाधः स गाधिपुत्रोऽपि गृहानुपैति ॥

Again in the *Anargharaghava* of Murari, Malyavan, though in a tone, bitter and complaining, refers to the role of Viswamitra as the path-breaker for the incarnatton, Rama, in the following verse.

यज्ञोपप्लवशान्तये परिणतो राजा सुतं याचितः
तं चानीय विनीय चायुधविधौ ते जघ्निरे राक्षसाः ।
त्रैयक्षं विदलय्य कार्मुकमथ स्वीकार्य सीतामितो
नो जाने कुहनाविटेन वटुना किं तेन कारिष्यते ॥

Note No. 14: *Janaka's Hymn on the wedding of Sita:*

इयं सीता मम सुता सहधर्मचरी तव ।
प्रतीच्छ चैनां भद्रं ते पाणिं गृह्णीष्व पाणिना ।
पतिव्रता महाभागा छायेवानुगता सदा ॥

The peculiarity here is that the first and the last words alone in each line constitute a *sutra*-like-combination and convey together the sense of the entire Hymn.

इयं तव ॥ प्रतीच्छ पाणिना ॥ पतिव्रता सदा ॥

The expression सहधर्मचरी here not only denotes the sacramental character of the marital union, but is also a prophetic intimation of the leading part Sita was to take along with Rama in Ravana Vadhah. Just as Sri Rama is styled महाभाग in the avatara sloka (विष्णोरर्धं महाभागं) Sita is here greeted as महाभागा.

परस्परतपःसम्पत् फलायितपरस्परौ ।

and also

आकाशः स्त्रियापूर्यते ।

It is said that Sita was loved by Rama firstly because she was his दाराः पितृकृताः । This is a technical term which is fully explained in the following Sloka in the Mahabharata:

धर्मतो वरयित्वा तु आनीय स्वं निवेशनम् ।
न्यायेन दत्ता तारुण्ये दाराः पितृकृताः स्मृताः ॥

Viswamitra is the chief character who is connected with each of the stages mentioned here Viz. *Varana*, *Anayana*, and *Dana*. The wedding therefore of the Brothers, especially of Rama and Sita, is extolled by Bhavabhuti, thus:

जनकानां रघूणां च सम्बन्धः कस्य न प्रियः ।
यत्र दाता गृहीता च स्वयं कुशिकनन्दनः ॥

Viswamitra is to the *Balakanda* what Hanuman is to the *Sundarakanda*.

Note No. 15: *The Breaking of Siva's Bow and advent of Parasurama:*

The encounter between Sri Rama and Parasurama has often been twisted to serve cheap dialectics having for their aim the denigration of Siva, or the undue glorification of Vishnu at the cost of Siva. But the true significance is far

otherwise. The *Sivadhanus* in the possession of Janaka was broken by Sri Rama and not bent. Parasurama was perfectly right in claiming that virtue had gone out of it long ago. But it had the effect of acting as a shield to protect Sita from being claimed by any one of the mob of kings who flocked to the *Swayamvara*. They could not even lift it; because it was the concretion of the pure matter, *Tamas*, inert and dead. Rama proved it had no life by breaking it. A bow that could thus break proves not indeed so much the might of the bowman, as its own condition. It was Parasurama's mission to hand over the arms of Vishnu to Vishnu himself in human form. The breaking of the earlier bow gave him one clear proof that he was on the track of the rightful owner; the other was the peculiar nature of his challenge. If Rama could handle his weapon i.e. the *Dhanus* of Vishnu, it would be conclusive evidence. The exit of Parasurama symbolises the emergence of the Kshatriya caste, once more chastened by chivalry. The coming of Rama was a guarantee that the warrior caste would no more resile from the performance of its proper Dharma.

The functions of the trinity are distinguished. The destroyer is essential for fresh creation; and there must be growth or development in between to impart significance to the functions of both of them. Philosophically, it is the same supreme which divided itself in the three-fold manner to help us to understand the cosmic process. Cf. Kalidasa:

नमस्त्रिमूर्तये तुभ्यं प्राक् सृष्टेः केवलात्मने ।
गुणत्रयविभागाय पश्चात् भेदमुपेयुषे ॥

Valmiki has shown how Rama represented all the three aspects, namely, of Preservation, Creation, and Destruction,

i. e. of Vishnu, Brahma and Rudra revealing each in its proper context. Compare;

विभुश्रिया विष्णुरिवामरेश्वरः। at the close of the Balakanda

उपविष्टं महाबाहुं ब्रह्माणमिव शाश्वतम्। at the time of meeting Bharata, in the Ayodhyakanda.

कृताभिषेको गिरिराजपुत्र्या रुद्रः सनन्दी भगवानिवेशः।

just before the advent of Surpanakha, which heralds the destructive aspect.

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